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# FAME <sup>AND</sup> FORTUNE WEEKLY.

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.



When Jack appeared up the steps of the vault he was seized by Pedro. "Aha! We have caught you!" he cried, exultingly. "Down with you among the bones of the padres!" The man with the crimson mask looked on and chuckled.



# Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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## THE CRIMSON MASK

OR,

### THE TREASURE OF SAN PEDRO

By A SELF-MADE MAN

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE TWO YOUNG CLERKS.

"What are you doing, Bob?" asked Jack Redwood, looking over the top of his desk at his chum and office mate, Bob Bassett, who was also perched on a high stool at a desk facing his own.

"Nothing," replied Bob, in an abstracted tone, with his eyes glued upon a boy's magazine.

"Good boy; you're working hard at it," returned Jack.

"I'm waiting for the boss to bring out the invoice book he took away from me," said Bob, without raising his eyes.

"And in the meantime you're killing time reading that Mexican story you gave the price of a nickel for."

"Well, what of it. I notice you're not above reading one yourself once in awhile," retorted Bob, turning a page and, after a glance in the direction of the open door connecting the room with the outer one where the head bookkeeper and his assistant were working, went on reading.

Jack and Bob were employed by Pickering & Co., mining agents, promoters and engineers, whose suite of very ordinary offices was situated on the second floor of a three-story building on Front street, near California, San Francisco.

The Co.'s name was William Winter.

He was a prospector and mining engineer, and represented the firm at the La Rosas mine, in the Sierra Madre mountain range, which divided the states of Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico.

The mine itself was about 150 miles east of Guaymas, an important town of Sonora, on the Gulf of California.

Pickering & Co. had acquired the La Rosas property,

which was considered a dead issue, some months previous, and then promoted a company to take it over.

Although right in the midst of many rich mines worked by their Mexican owners, it had apparently petered out.

After unloading 49,000 shares of an issue of 100,000 on a credulously California public at 25 cents a share, Alonzo Pickering called a meeting of the stockholders and had himself elected president; his brother-in-law, a California street broker, secretary and treasurer, and his partner, vice-president and general manager.

Then Winter, who was at the mine, was instructed to make a good bluff, and send in favorable reports of developments that were being made on the property.

Pickering expected nothing from it, but he was figuring on issuing another series of shares, which he expected would go off like hotcakes, as the general silver situation in Chihuahua was bright, and was attracting favorable attention.

It was about this time that Mexican papers began to report the depredation of a gang of bandits, under the leadership of a man whose features were hidden by a crimson mask.

Every now and then a convoy of rich ore, enroute to Chihuahua from the Sierra Madre, was attacked by the band and looted.

Representation was made to the Mexican authorities by the owners of the mines in that section of the Sierra Madre range about these bold and serious robberies, but though soldiers were sent to search for the Crimson Mask, and his men, no trace of them could be found.

While the soldiers were prowling around the range remained tranquil, just as if no bandits existed, but as soon as the military was withdrawn the depredations commenced again.



Winter reported these facts, as he might mention some bit of news that did not concern him, and Pickering read his references to the bandits with a sort of languid interest, and suppressed the information lest the La Rosas stockholders, learning the facts, might ask questions which he didn't care to answer.

One of Winter's letters, containing a clipping in English from a Chihuahua City daily paper, after having been consigned by Pickering to his wastebasket, came into Bob Bassett's possession, and the clipping, as well as the letter, greatly interested him.

He showed it to Jack, and for some days the chums talked of little else between themselves than the Crimson Mask and his band of bandits.

It was about this time that a very important and unexpected thing happened.

Winter, while exploring an abandoned section of the La Rosas mine, brought to light a very rich lode of silver ore.

He immediately notified his partner.

Pickering was astonished, and he wouldn't believe it until he wired Winter for positive confirmation, and received it.

The head of the firm at once recalled the order he had placed with the lithographers for a new issue of treasury shares, and gave the news out to all the San Francisco papers.

They printed it and the holders of the 49,000 shares of La Rosas mining stock began to pat themselves on the back for having invested in the mine.

Pickering, through his brother-in-law, had no difficulty in getting the mine listed on the California Street Exchange, and it began to be freely dealt in at fifty cents and higher.

The company had money in the treasury to begin operations on a small scale at the mine, and Winter lost no time in getting the ore out.

When he had collected 100 bags of it he sent it by mule convoy to Guaymas, thence by schooner up the Gulf and the Colorado River to Yuma, in Arizona, where it was put on a freight car of the Southern Pacific road and carried to San Francisco.

A couple of bags were taken to the office of Pickering & Co., and put on exhibition, and the rest was sent to Selby & Co.'s smelting works.

Samples were sent to the assay office in Merchant street, and the flattering report of the assayer was lithographed, and a copy sent by mail to all the stockholders of record, as well as to the newspapers.

A month had elapsed and a second shipment of the ore was being looked forward to by Pickering, who was in high feather over the prospects of the mine, in which the firm held the controlling interest, when our story opens.

There were a few moments of silence in the room after the few words that passed between the boys, which was broken only by the scratching of Jack's pen.

"Thank goodness, that job is done!" he exclaimed, throwing down his pen, getting off his stool and stretching himself.

Then after a squint in the direction of the open door he went around and whacked Bob on the back.

"Here, I say, what are you doing?" remonstrated his chum.

"I thought I'd wake you up," laughed Jack.

"I wasn't asleep, you lobster!" growled Jack.

"That must be a new yarn you've got hold of, you're so interested in it."

"It is. I bought it this morning on my way here."

"What's the name of it?"

"Bertram, or the Secret of the Fiery Lake."

"You never took to stories till you got hold of that clipping about the Crimson Mask. Now that is something worth reading about—a real, live bandit and not a product of an author's brain. I wonder why he sports the Crimson Mask?"

"To hide his identity, of course, you chump."

"But why a crimson one? Why not one less conspicuous?"

"Ask me something easier. How do I know why he wears a crimson one in preference to a black one, which is what most crooks wear? Maybe that was the only kind he could get hold of. Or perhaps that's his taste. Those Mexicans have an eye for gaudy colors. Look at the way the girls dress down there, in all the colors of the rainbow."

"How do you know that?"

"Haven't I seen them on the stage in comic opera?"

"Why, you boob, what else would you expect in comic opera but attractive-looking costumes?"

"I've seen pictures of them in books."

"In colors?"

"No; but they were described as being attired in a picturesque way."

"How would you like to go to Mexico?"

"I don't know as I'm stuck on going."

"Just think of the excitement you might run against. This town is slower than molasses."

"It isn't as slow as Philadelphia, where you came from," grinned Bob, who knew Jack was a little touchy on the subject.

"You seem to know a lot about Philadelphia and you never was out of this State."

"I know what I've read about it. It's so slow in Philadelphia that—"

"That will do. Cut it out. I don't want to hear any funny newspaper cracks."

"So this town is too slow for you?"

"It's slower than when the Vigilance Committee ran it."

"That's ancient history. Are you anxious to go to Mexico? If you are maybe you can persuade Pickering to send you to help boss our mine."

"Well, don't worry. There isn't much chance of the boss letting such an invaluable junior clerk as me get away from him."

"I wouldn't flatter myself. He might be glad of a chance to lose you."

"If he lost me there wouldn't be any work done in this room—not while you were here."

At that moment there came a rap, rap, rap at the door.

"Go and see what that is, Bob," said Jack.

"Go yourself. You're nearest to it."

"I'm boss of this room."

"You only think you are."

Rap, rap, rap.



"Come in," shouted Jack.

The door opened and a telegraph messenger entered.

"This is Pickering's, ain't it?" said the boy.

"And Co. Always put in the Co. We like it," said Jack.

"Aw, rats!" snorted the messenger. "Is Pickering in?"

"Why don't you say Mr. Pickering, you uneducated boob? Yes, he's in. Got a telegram for him?"

"Yes."

"Then hand it over."

"You ain't Pickering."

"Well, I represent him. Produce, and I'll sign your paper."

"Here it is, you smart aleck."

Jack took the envelope and signed the paper.

"There you are; now run along, you little lobster."

"Aw, you make me tired," growled the messenger, as he made his exit, slamming the door after him.

"Take this in to the boss, Bob."

"What's the matter with you taking it to him yourself, you've got as much time as I have?"

"Look out—drop that novel. Here he comes now," said Jack.

Bob almost fell over himself in his rush to get the story-book out of sight.

Jack laughed as he walked into the next room, for Pickering wasn't coming at all, and Bob felt as if he could kick him.

Crossing the middle room where the two men were industriously working on the books, Jack knocked at the door marked "Private."

"Come in," said the voice of Pickering.

"Telegram for you, sir," said the boy, going up to his desk and handing it to him.

The head of the firm tore the envelope open and read the enclosure.

Then he said something that wouldn't look well in print.

"By heavens! I won't stand for this. I'll appeal to the Secretary of State. These outrages have got to be stopped," he exclaimed aloud. "One hundred and twenty bags of ore and sixty mules stolen, and, what is worse, Mr. Smith murdered for trying to defend the property. It's intolerable! If this business is allowed to go on we won't be able to get our output to tidewater. This mustn't get out, or the stockholders will come buzzing around my ears. Winter wants somebody sent down right away who can speak both English and Spanish, to take Smith's place. Who the dickens shall I send?"

Then Pickering saw Jack standing in the room.

"What are you waiting for?" he roared.

"I thought maybe you had an answer to—"

"No, I haven't. Get out!"

And Jack got out in double-quick time.

## CHAPTER II.

### UNDER ORDERS.

"The boss has got a fit," said Jack when he got back to his desk.

"Got a fit!" cried Bob. "What do you mean?"

"The telegram gave it to him."

"Bad news?"

"I should judge so. I heard him say that 120 bags of silver ore had been stolen, the mules scattered, and Winter's chief assistant, meaning Smith, I suppose, murdered for trying to defend the ore."

"Whew!" exclaimed Bob. "That's the work of the Crimson Mask bandits, I s'pose?"

"Evidently. Pickering never worried about them before, but now that they've trodden on his pocketbook he's mad enough to chew nails. He says he's going to appeal to the Secretary of State."

"Did he tell you that?"

"No, he told me to get out."

"Get out!"

"Of the room. I was so interested in the effect that the telegram produced on him that I forgot to leave of my own accord."

Bob grinned.

"Served you right. What business had you to be curious?"

"No business; but if I hadn't listened you wouldn't have heard the news. Here, I've got a job for you."

"Don't want it. Didn't I tell you I was waiting for the invoice book?"

"Go in and get it, then. Do you expect the boss to fetch it to you?"

It struck Bob that perhaps he'd better go in and ask for it.

He knocked on the door of the private room and was told to enter.

Pickering was at his desk writing a letter to the Secretary of State.

"Well, what do you want?" he snapped, looking up.

"Are you through with the invoice book, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, take it and get out."

"Gee! The boss is awfully mad over that telegram," thought Bob, picking up the book and starting for the door.

"Bassett!" roared Pickering.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Redwood to step in here."

"Yes, sir."

Bob hurried back to the little room.

"The boss wants you, Jack. Get a move on," he said.

"All right," said Jack, slipping off his stool.

"He's mad clear through. I could hear him grinding his teeth," chuckled Bob.

Jack entered the private room.

"Redwood, you talk Spanish," said Pickering, abruptly.

"Yes, sir. Got something to translate?"

"No."

The word shot out of Pickering's mouth like a stone from a catapult.

"How long will it take you to get ready to leave town?"

"Leave town, sir?" cried Jack, not a little surprised.

"For Mexico."

"Do you want me to go to the mine?"

"Where do you think I want you to go, confound you?"

"I can be ready by tomorrow if necessary."

"See that you are. I want you to take the Southern



Pacific to Yuma. You'll find some kind of a boat there that'll take you to Guaymas. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you don't find one ready to start at once, hire one. You'll be provided with the funds to see you through to Real del Monte, that's the nearest village to the mine. The La Rosas is only about five miles from it. What are you working on now?"

Jack told him.

"Turn it over to Bassett, and tell him he's got to do your work and his own till further notice. He's been having too easy a time. He'll have to earn his wages after this. Clean up things, show him what to do, and then report to Brown. He'll hand you the funds you'll need."

"All right, sir."

"You're getting \$15 a week, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your wages, until further notice, will be \$25, subject to a raise by Mr. Winter if he thinks you are worth it."

"Thank you, sir."

"You needn't thank me. I'm not a philanthropist. If I didn't think you were worth the money I wouldn't promote you to Smith's place."

"Then Mr. Smith—"

"Was shot and killed by those infernal Crimson Mask bandits when they looted a mule train of silver ore on the way from the mine to Guaymas."

"That is too bad, sir."

"The next train that goes out will be under your charge. See that you give a good account of it."

"I suppose I had better provide myself with a good rifle and a revolver."

"Do so. Get an up-to-date Remington and have the bill sent to the office. Buy whatever you consider necessary."

"You seem to have some confidence in me?"

"I have. You're a smart boy. I've been watching you."

"Bob is smart, too, sir."

A hyena-like grin swept across Pickering's face.

"I'll make him smart before I get through with him," he said, grimly.

"Is that all, sir?"

"Yes. When you are ready to leave the office come in."

Jack walked back to the room where Bob sat perched at work, unconscious of the change that had taken place in his chum's prospects.

"Bob," said Jack.

"Hello, what do you want?"

"Will you be through with that job you are on soon?"

"About lunch time."

"Come here, I want to give you some instructions so that you can do my work, too."

"Your work? What have I got to do with your work?"

"Hereafter you will attend to it in conjunction with your own."

"What's that? What are you giving me?"

"The boss's orders."

Bob stared at him.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I've been promoted."

"You don't say so! To the next room?"

"No. I'm going to take Mr. Smith's place at the mine."

"What! Are you going to Mexico?"

"Tomorrow morning by the 8.45 train on the S. P. I tranship at Yuma."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Bob, staring blankly at him. "This is sudden."

"Rather, but that's my orders."

"How long are you going to stay away?"

"Indefinitely."

"And have I got to attend to your work and my own, too?"

"That's what Mr. Pickering said. He said you have been having too easy a time and that you'll have to earn your wages after this."

"Did he really say that?"

"He did. I told him you were a smart boy, and he said he'd make you smart before he got through with you."

"I like that. So he expects me to do your work and my own, too? What does he take me for—a dray horse?"

"I didn't ask him. Hereafter you'll have to do your novel reading somewhere else. You'll have to get a big hustle on to do all the boss has planned out for you."

"Is that so? I guess I'll resign."

"Nonsense! You'll probably get a raise in wages."

"Did he say he was going to raise me?"

"No, but I guess Mr. Pickering will pay you as much as he thinks you are worth."

"If your work is shifted on me I ought to get \$20."

"Well, come over here and let me give you pointers. I haven't any time to lose. I've got to buy a number of things, including a rifle, and pack up."

"What's the rifle for? Expect to clean up the Crimson Mask gang?" grinned Bob.

"There is no telling. At any rate I don't intend to let the bandits clean me up if I can help it."

"I wish I were going with you. I'd like to help exterminate the Crimson Mask. This book of mine gives a lot of pointers how that might be done. The hero didn't do a thing to the bunch, and Bertram and his pals were a mighty tough lot."

"The fellow who wrote that story never saw a real bandit in his life. It's easy to do up a gang of bandits in your mind, but a horse of a different color to do them up in real life. The Crimson Mask is no magazine rascal, but the real goods. If I ever come across him, and live to tell my experience, I'll write you all about it, and you can make a story out of it yourself if you know how."

Bob didn't seem very enthusiastic over receiving information at second hand.

He had the idea that if the hero of his novel could pull off stunts singlehanded against the notorious Bertram and his twenty followers, that he and Jack, properly armed, could make the Crimson Mask and his gang of Greasers look like a bush league team when stacked up against the winners of a major league pennant.

He came over and got his instructions, but he didn't pay a whole lot of attention to them.

Office work had suddenly lost all interest to him.

He began to feel that his talents fitted him for a more exciting sphere of action.

He was silent and preoccupied when he went to lunch, which showed that his brain pan was working at high pressure, which was rather a new thing for him.



When he got back Jack had left the office, but as the boys roomed together, they would undoubtedly come together again that evening.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ON THE WAY TO MEXICO.

Jack and Bob talked long and earnestly together that evening.

The former thought his chum acted rather strangely, as if he had something on his mind, but he put it down to the regret he believed Bob felt at parting with him.

The boys were up early, and after breakfast started for the depot of the Southern Pacific road at the foot of Fourth and Townsend streets.

Finally the time came when the conductor shouted "All aboard!"

"Goodby, old chap," cried Jack, grasping Bob's hand. "You'll hear from me soon. And don't forget to write me at Real del Monte, care of La Rosas mine."

With those words he sprang on the train which was already moving slowly out of the station.

We will not follow him on his trip, which took him through the populous and growing young city of Los Angeles.

It is enough to say that he finally reached the small town of Yuma, on the eastern bank of the Colorado River, about on a line with the boundary of lower California, and here he left the train with his trunk and other articles and registered at a rather cheap-looking hotel.

The first thing he did was to make inquiries concerning any vessel that was on the point of leaving for Guaymas.

He found to his disappointment that there was nothing doing in that line for two or three days, nor was there any small craft on the water front that he could charter to take him to Mexico.

There was nothing for him to do but make up his mind to remain at least three days in Yuma, which was a pretty hot town.

He went to the telegraph office and wired his arrival to Pickering, adding that it was impossible for him to leave town by water under three days.

"Where are you stopping?" asked the clerk. "In case you should get an answer to this we want to know where to deliver it."

"I don't expect an answer; still there is no telling but some instructions might be sent to me. You'll find me at the Yuma House," replied the boy.

Jack was sitting down to supper that evening when a telegram was brought to him.

Its contents rather surprised him.

This is what he read:

"To Jack Redwood, Yuma, Arizona.—Bassett missing. Suspect he's followed you. Should he turn up at Yuma send him back.

"ALONZO PICKERING."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Jack. "I wonder

if he has followed me? I remember he acted kind of peculiar the night before I left 'Frisco. He's crazy enough to do anything that he takes into his head. I must be on hand at the station in the morning when the east-bound train comes in to see if he's a passenger. My orders are to send him back, but if he won't go back I can't make him. When Bob gets a kink in his head he's as stubborn as a mule. I know him. If he's made up his mind to go to Mexico, and gets as far as this, he'll go the rest of the way in spite of anything I may say to the contrary. On the whole I'd like to have his company, but if I should take him on to the mine I'm sure to hear from Pickering about it."

Next morning Jack was at the station when the train came in, but his chum was not on it, and to say the truth Jack was rather disappointed.

On the following morning he went to the train again, but there was no Bob.

"I guess Pickering went off half cocked," said Jack to himself. "Probably Bob absented himself from the office one day for some reason, and the old man jumped at the first conclusion that occurred to him."

He went to the telegraph office and sent the following message:

"Been here three days. No Bob. Leave first thing in morning by schooner.

"REDWOOD."

During his stay at Yuma, Jack had seen everything that was to be seen in the town, which wasn't a whole lot.

That afternoon he was hanging around the station talking to the agent, when a long freight train rumbled in, the engine stopping opposite the eating-house.

The train crew ate an early supper there, and they came piling up from different parts of the train.

The conductor came all the way from the caboose at the end of the train, and with him was a well-built lad carrying a suit-case in one hand and a rifle in a case in the other.

This was Bob Bassett, who had traveled first-class as far as Los Angeles, and then by various devices succeeded in getting passage on several freights until he succeeded in reaching Yuma.

Jack saw him coming down the station platform and gave a gasp.

"Upon my word, you've come at last, have you," exclaimed Jack, running up to him. "And by a freight at that?"

"I didn't expect to find you here, old man," said Bob, "and you can gamble on it that I'm tickled to run across you. But you talk as if you expected me. I never hinted that I had made up my mind to follow you."

"I know you didn't. But I got a telegram from Pickering. When you failed to turn up at the office he suspected you had started to join me here, and he sent me word to fire you back."

"Fire me back?"

"Yes. Here is his dispatch. Read it for yourself," and Jack took it out of his pocket and showed it to his chum.

"What are you going to do about it?" said Bob, grimly.



"Buy you a ticket for 'Frisco and put you on the train which is due here in half an hour."

"That's what you're going to do, eh?"

"Those are my instructions."

"I think I see you doing it," grinned Bob.

"You won't go back?"

"You can bet your suspenders I won't. I didn't beat my way from Los Angeles on three freights to be returned like a lot of damaged goods."

"I'm afraid you'll lose your job with the firm if you don't go back."

"Don't you worry, I'll be all right when I reach the mine. I'm solid with Winter. He'll give me something to do."

"All right, but I'll get it hot from Pickering for taking you there."

"Shoot Pickering! He's way back in 'Frisco. Let him go bag."

"That's all very well, but remember he's the president of the company and the boss of the coop. He's got a long reach, even if he is way back in 'Frisco."

"Well, Winter is vice-president and general manager. If he gives me a billet, Pickering will let it go at that."

"Very well. If you think your chances are good at the mine I'll be glad to have you there."

"I'm going to help you protect the mule trains with the silver ore. I bought a Remington like yours, and it's warranted to shoot straight."

"Would you have the nerve to shoot the Crimson Mask if you came across him?"

"I'd shoot at anything that tried to get too gay with the firm's property."

"You mean the company."

"The firm runs the company. Whatever silver the mine turns out Pickering & Co. is going to have the larger share of."

"Yes, I guess you're right."

"Sure I am. When are you going to leave this place?"

"First thing in the morning by the schooner El Capitan."

"Then I didn't get here any too quick."

"No, hit the bull's-eye by an eyelash."

"Oh, I always land on my feet. You'll have to put me up at your hash-house."

"We'll go there as soon as the west-bound train comes in," said Jack.

"Why do you want to wait for that?"

"Just for a little excitement. There isn't much doing here that interests me."

"I should think there would be judging from the looks of the men hanging around. More than half of them are carrying revolvers as if they were looking for a scrap."

"I haven't heard of any scrap since I've been here."

"Here comes the train."

Way down the line to the east could be seen the big locomotive drawing a heavy train of sleepers, with a mail, express and a couple of day coaches in front.

The train drew up with a rush and squeaking of the air-brakes.

The passengers came trooping out for supper, and there was quite a bunch of them.

As the train would lie there for twenty minutes, Jack said they would not wait longer.

"I suppose I ought to telegraph your arrival to Pickering, and tell him that you won't go back," he said.

"Don't you do it. What's the use of stirring him up."

"All right, I won't. There's the hotel yonder where I put up."

"It doesn't look much like the Palace in 'Frisco," grinned Bob.

"It's a whole lot better in its way, for they don't put on any style here."

When they arrived the negro boy was banging a Chinese gong to notify guests that the evening meal was ready.

Bob registered for the night, and he and Jack went straight to the dining-room.

After supper Jack showed his chum about the town and they went to bed.

At six next morning they and their baggage were on board the schooner El Capitan, bound down the river, their destination being Guaymas.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A VISION OF BEAUTY.

It took the schooner two days to reach Guaymas, the distance being over 400 miles, and the captain said they made good time at that.

At last the boys were on the soil of Mexico—the land of sun and flowers, of love and hate, of the dagger and the pistol.

Jack lost no time in arranging for a conveyance to carry them to the village of Real del Monte, where Mr. Winter had his residence.

They started after a light lunch along a dusty yellow road, with the Sierra de Bacatete range looming up on their right to the south.

The driver told Jack that they would reach Real del Monte some time on the following afternoon.

"Where do we put up for the night?" asked the boy.

"At the inn of the 'Woman without a Head', senor, in the village of Bonancita," was the reply.

"How far is that from Guaymas?"

"About five-and-sixty miles, senor."

"When do you expect to get there?"

"About nine o'clock, if we are fortunate."

"Why shouldn't we be fortunate?"

The driver shrugged his shoulders with a peculiar smile that you only see on a Mexican's face.

It was as eloquent as words if you read it aright.

"You have been to Real del Monte before, I judge?"

"More times than I have fingers and toes, senor."

"Then we ought to go through all right, for you must know the road like a book."

The driver did not answer, but rolled and lighted another cigarette.

"What were you talking about, Jack?" asked Bob, curiously, for the conversation had been carried on in Spanish.

Jack told him.



"He's a rascally-looking rooster, I think," said Bob, referring to the driver.

"I guess he's honest as Mexicans of his condition go," replied Jack.

"I'm glad we've got our revolvers handy."

"Are you suspicious of meeting with the Crimson Mask?"

"No, I'm suspicious of the driver."

"I'm willing to take chances on him. There are two of us, and he is only one."

"You don't know who we're likely to meet along the road."

"They wouldn't get much out of you, nor a whole lot out of me, if they were in force enough to hold us up. But I don't think there's any danger of that."

"Ask him about the Crimson Mask."

"Say, Bruno," said Jack, addressing the driver, "do you know anything about the Crimson Mask bandits?"

"Me, senior; Heaven forbid," replied the man, in a shifty tone.

"They haunt the Sierra Madre range mostly, don't they?"

"So I have heard—the eastern slope."

"So you have heard? Don't you know?"

"I know nothing about them, senior. They do not come this side of the mountains."

"But a mule train of ore from La Rosas mine was attacked by them a few days ago this side of Real del Monte."

"How does the senior know that?" asked the driver, with a keen look.

"The manager of the mine reported the facts to the company."

"The company?" said the driver, apparently puzzled.

"The people who own the mine."

"They are Americans. The ore, I have heard, is shipped to the United States."

"That's right—to San Francisco, in California, where the offices of the company are."

"Is not there silver in plenty in California?" asked Bruno.

"There is always room for some more."

"Caramba! Why should los Americans come here for silver when they have plenty at home? The feeling here is Mexico for the Mexicans."

Jack didn't like the fellow's manner so he said nothing more to him, but turning to Bob told him what Bruno said about the bandits.

As the afternoon passed away they made good progress along the road.

The boys spent the time talking and looking at the scenery of the country.

At no time did they lose sight of the Sierra de Bacatete range, which rose peak on peak in solemn and stately grandeur, fifteen odd miles away, though it seemed very much nearer.

The route they were following was fairly level, dotted with small farms, thatched huts at the edge of the road, and well sprinkled with trees, and bright-hued vegetation.

Finally the sun descended behind them and it grew dark with surprising quickness, the interval which is called dusk lasting only a short time.

By this time the boys were very hungry, and they eagerly looked toward the inn they were to put up at.

"How much further to Bonancita?" Jack asked the driver.

"Not far, maybe twelve miles," he replied, whipping up the team.

Two hours later they entered the village and came to a stop before the inn, which stood beside the road on the outskirts.

The boys carried their light baggage into the inn, and were welcomed by the landlord with profuse hospitality.

They were shown to a room on the second floor, and there they deposited their grips and rifles, but their revolvers were strapped around their waists, and they did not remove them.

A very good meal, on the Mexican plan, was served to them at a table on the porch by a pretty senorita, with the darkest of eyes, who quite fascinated Bob.

She chatted briskly with Jack, who complimented her on her good looks and charming ways, and altogether made himself quite solid with her.

"Your friend, he does not talk?" she said, with a goo-goo glance at Bob.

"He does not speak the Spanish language," replied Jack.

"What a pity, and he is so good-looking," with another look at Bob.

"Say, what is she saying about me?" asked Bob, who was jealous of the monopoly Jack had in the girl.

"She says you're a fine-looking fellow, and it's a pity you don't talk the lingo," replied his chum.

"Get out. What are you giving me?"

"The truth."

"I don't believe you. She wouldn't talk about my looks."

As Bob looked at the girl while he was speaking she became curious to learn if he was talking about her.

"What is he saying, senior?"

"He said you were the handsomest senorita he ever saw," laughed Jack.

The girl blushed, and made a courtesy to Bob.

"What did she do that for?" asked Bob. "What in creation are you saying to her about me?"

"I told her you said she was the loveliest of her sex."

"What did you do that for? Want to make me look like a fool?"

"You think she is, don't you?"

"None of your blamed business what I think about her."

"Well, don't get mad about it. She is looking surprised at the tone of your voice. If you want to stand well with her get up a flirtation with your eyes. That is a language that is universally understood."

Bob took the hint, and as the senorita was willing to go more than half way, he got on pretty well with her.

Next morning they resumed their journey and about noon reached Rio Chico, a small village, fifteen miles west of their destination.

This hamlet nestled at the foot of a small independent mountain range, and was a somewhat picturesque spot.

The inn before which the vehicle drew up was no great shakes, but the landlord seemed very glad to see them just the same.



The prospect of good entertainment there appeared to be very dubious.

"Is this the only inn here?" Jack asked Bruno.

"The only one, senor. You will be well treated. But it is early for dinner, so if you give your order, and have a little patience, you will have no fault to find."

"What can you give us to eat, landlord?" asked Jack.

"A nice fat pullet, senor," he said, and then went on to mention other things that made the prospect of a good meal more encouraging than the look of the house indicated.

"All right. Do your best, landlord. How long will it take you to get dinner?"

An hour at least, he was informed, but in the meanwhile the senors, suggested the landlord, could amuse themselves around the village, or they could go up and look at the waterfall in the glen.

"We'll look at the waterfall. Where is the glen?"

The landlord pointed out the direction.

They must follow the defile which was just beyond the village, and after a short walk they would come upon the waterfall.

It was not much of a waterfall, the landlord admitted, but all things considered it was worth visiting in preference to hanging around the inn.

"Come on, Bob," said Jack.

"Where are you going, old man?" asked his chum.

"To see the sights of the neighborhood. Dinner won't be ready for an hour or longer, and we've got to kill time somehow."

"Is it safe to leave our guns in the vehicle?" asked Bob.

"I guess so. The driver is taking his rig into the yard, so nothing is likely to be disturbed," replied Jack.

So the boys set off through the village, attracting a great deal of attention from the natives, who came to their doors to stare at them.

"One would think we were persons of importance," said Bob.

"We're strangers, and the fact is enough of itself to arouse curiosity about us; but in addition they can easily see that we're Americans, and that is another reason why we are inspected."

"Are Americans popular down here?" asked Bob.

"No, I don't think the people have much love for us. The driver showed it in his conversation with me when we first started out from Guaymas. He used the phrase of Mexico for the Mexicans, which was as good as saying that Americans were not wanted. We may therefore consider ourselves *persona non grata*."

"What's that?"

"Not in good standing with the community. Or in plain English, our room would be considered better than our company. Do you get me?"

"I'd be pretty thick if I didn't. Then we are likely to get the cold shoulder down here?"

"I don't imagine that the natives would go into a paroxysm of grief if we turned up our toes."

Notwithstanding Jack's statement no inhospitality was shown toward the boys.

They were simply regarded with a trifle more curiosity than would have fallen to their lot in passing through a

small American village where strangers were not often seen.

They passed through the hamlet and walked up the side of the mountain to the ravine, which they entered.

They found themselves in a wild and romantic spot, with not a sign of life around them.

They might as well have been hundreds of miles from civilization as far as their immediate surroundings were concerned.

A circuitous tramp over boulders and through brush brought them at length to the glen, and there the waterfall burst on their view.

It was very pretty so far as it went, and with the glen would have been hailed with delight by a kodak fiend, or even a less enthusiastic amateur photographer.

"It isn't so bad," said Jack, as they took in the view.

Then he uttered an exclamation and pointed to a spot of velvet turf a short distance away.

Lying asleep in a negligent attitude was the loveliest girl Jack had ever dreamed of.

Her face was exquisitely chiseled in the purest Spanish type, and it was easy to see that she came from fine stock.

Her figure was rounded in the most artistic proportions, and altogether she was a dream of female beauty.

Her mantilla of expensive black lace had partly slipped over her head and exposed a head of hair that doubtless was the envy of her sex.

Her head rested on one of her arms, and her lips were slightly parted, showing the pearly teeth behind.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Bob, "she's a beaut."

Jack softly approached her to get a closer view, and Bob was following when he saw his chum stop suddenly, stare at the ground near the senorita's extended arm, and then, to his amazement, slip his hand to his hip and draw his revolver.

"What in thunder—" began Bob, but Jack raised his hand as a warning for him to be silent.

Bob stopped and gazed at Jack with all eyes.

Slowly Jack raised his revolver and took aim at something he saw in the grass.

It was a peculiar-looking snake, coiled on its tail, as if about to spring on the sleeper.

In another moment Jack pulled the trigger.

There was a flash, a whip-like report, and the girl sprang on her feet with a thrilling scream and looked at the boy with frightened eyes.

## CHAPTER V.

### MERCEDES CASTILANO AND HER FATHER.

"Don't be afraid, senorita," said Jack, raising his hat with his left hand, while he held his revolver in his right.

"The danger is over."

"Danger!" she exclaimed in liquid tones of the purest Castilian. "What mean you, senor? Why did you shoot?"

Jack pointed at the twisting and writhing reptile, its head shattered by the bullet from his gun.

"Madre de Dios!" exclaimed the girl, gazing at the snake with eyes of horror. "It is one of the *dama blanca*



species—the most deadly kind in the country. Its bite is fatal.”

“I saw it as it was coiled and about to spring at your extended arm. I did not know how deadly it was, but all snakes are alike to me—dangerous!”

“Senor, you have saved my life,” she cried, impulsively seizing his hand, revolver and all, and carrying it to her ruby lips. “Heavens knows how grateful I am to you. I thank you with all my heart.”

“You are welcome, senorita. It is a pleasure to me to have rendered you a service,” replied Jack, his heart beating like a triphammer under glances of her glorious eyes, which he now saw for the first time.

“Tell me your name, senor, that I may remember it in my prayers, when next I go to mass,” she said.

“Jack Redwood.”

“Jack Redwood,” she repeated. “You are an American?”

“Yes, senorita.”

“Yet you speak Spanish perfectly.”

Jack bowed.

“May I ask your name, senorita?” he said.

“Mercedes Castilano.”

“You are Spanish?”

“Si, senor.”

“And you live in this neighborhood?”

“Si, senor,” she said, in a low tone, a rich flush flying in her face as she cast down her eyes.

“I should be glad to see you to your hacienda, senorita, if you care for my company.”

“No, no, no!” she cried with sudden energy, which rather surprised Jack. “I—I—you—pardon me, it is impossible.”

“Very well, senorita; I have no wish to intrude on your company. I merely thought—you understand me,” said Jack, clearly disappointed.

The girl saw the look on his face.

“Senor,” she said, laying her hands on her breast, “do not feel provoked with me. I cannot explain why it is impossible that you can accompany me. I must first tell father. But you are a stranger. Perhaps I may never see you again. Are you going to the silver mines in the Sierra Madre, or perhaps you are returning to Guaymas?”

“I am going to the La Rosas mine, five miles or so beyond the village of Real del Monte, which I understand is fifteen miles from the village yonder, where we have stopped to dine. I have been sent from San Francisco to take the place of the man who a few days was murdered by the Crimson Mask and—”

He was interrupted by a sudden cry from the girl as she drew back and put her hands to her face.

“What is the matter, senorita? Does the name of the Crimson Mask frighten you?”

She did not reply, but seemed all of a tremble.

“Pardon me, senorita, for distressing you. I would not have mentioned the name had I suspected—”

“Suspected! What mean you, senor? You cannot suspect that—no, no, it is impossible!” she cried, feverishly.

Her manner was so strange and excited that Jack did not know what to think.

“I was about to say that I would not have mentioned

the bandit’s name had I thought it would have distressed you.”

“Ah, yes, yes; I see. Forgive me. You must think me a very strange creature, but if you knew my position. Ah, senor, you are good, and brave, and so handsome. How happy would I be if I were permitted the pleasure of having you for a friend. But I have none—none but my father.”

Her voice ended in a dry sob, she dropped her face in her hands.

Jack’s sympathies went out to her, even as his heart had already gone.

“It cannot be that one so lovely as yourself has cause to be unhappy, senorita,” he said.

“Unhappy! Madre de Dios! If you knew! But let us talk about something else,” she added hurriedly. “You say you are going to La Rosas mine to take the place of a man who—is dead?”

“Yes, senorita. It will be my business to accompany the mule train of silver ore each time it goes to Guaymas.”

“No, no, senor, you must not,” she cried, seizing him by the hands with feverish earnestness. “Anything else, but not that.”

“Why what do you mean?” cried the astonished boy.

“It is dangerous—dangerous! You have saved my life. I am grateful. I can not bear that you should run the certain risk of losing yours.”

“It is my duty, senorita, and a true American never shirks that, be the peril what it may.”

“But you do not know what you would have to face.”

“You mean the Crimson Ma—”

She clapped one of her hands on his lips.

“You would face death.”

“Well, senorita, a fellow can’t die but once, and I intend to carry out my orders. If those bandits interfere with my mule train there’ll be something doing that’ll open their eyes. As for the leader of that gang—well, you saw what I did to that snake. I have an American Remington that’s warranted to kill at 1,000 yards or further, and I can shoot some. I’ll know him by his mask, and if I ever get a fair crack at him he won’t lead any more ruffians on mule trains of silver ore,” said Jack in a determined tone.

The girl seemed overwhelmed by the boy’s words.

“You would shoot—him?” she cried, almost hysterically.

“Why not? Isn’t he the terror of the mine owners of the Sierra Madre? Didn’t he, or one of his ruffians, kill the man whose place I have been sent to fill? Well, my instructions are to carry the ore trains through to Guaymas, and I’m going to do it—if I live.”

“Brave young senor! Spoken like a brave Americano. I wish you success!” cried a hearty voice in Spanish, as a fine-looking man of forty stepped out of the bushes and faced Jack.

The senorita uttered a smothered exclamation, and drew away from the boy.

Jack was much impressed by the newcomer.

He looked like one of nature’s noblemen.

His snappy black eyes flashed like one born to command.

His manner at that moment seemed exceedingly gracious, but Jack felt he could be stern and authoritative when he chose.



"Thank you for the compliment, senor," replied Jack. "I meant what I said."

"You look as if you did," said the newcomer, with a kind of military directness. "So you have come to Mexico to exterminate the Crimson Mask and his band, eh?"

There was a slight tinge of sarcasm in his voice.

"Not at all. If the bandits leave me alone I certainly shall not bother with them," said Jack. "It is the business of the Mexican government to take care of them."

"Which they have failed to do, and always will."

"Why do you say that, senor? Do you not sympathize with your own government?"

"My government! I am a Spaniard," drawing himself up proudly, "and I owe no fealty to Mexico."

"Still, while you live in the country it is to your interest to—"

"We will not discuss that. Let us return to the subject you spoke about. What are your plans for carrying your silver trains to Guaymas so as to avoid the Crimson Mask and his followers?"

As he asked the question the senorita made a step forward as though to interfere, but the newcomer, though not looking at her, seemed to perceive her purpose and made a slight gesture which to Jack appeared to have no reference to her, but which she evidently understood, for she stopped and cast down her eyes.

"I have no plans as yet," replied Jack. "I am a stranger in the country, and have not yet reported to my superior. I shall act under his orders and do the best I can."

"Very good, senor. I think I heard you say you have a Remington rifle, and that you are an expert shot."

"You heard right, senor."

"Can you hit a man at 1,000 yards?"

"Hardly, except by accident."

"At 500, then?"

"It would be a chance unless the man stood still and invited the shot."

"But suppose you got an excellent chance at the Crimson Mask at fifty yards or even feet, he would have no show of escaping you, eh?"

"I wouldn't give much for his life."

"Excellent!" laughed the Spaniard. "Perhaps the chance will be yours soon; but beware lest he gets the drop on you first. I have heard he can shoot some himself. I have myself taken lessons of his instructors. Let me show you what I can do."

The Spaniard took a five-spot of clubs from his pocket and pinned it to a tree with a small jewel dagger.

Then he stepped off thirty paces, turned and fired four times in quick succession.

To Jack's astonishment he put a bullet into each of the four corner spots.

"That's fine shooting, senor," said the boy. "I have never seen it beaten, or, for that matter equalled. I take my hat off to you."

A sarcastic smile stole over the Spaniard's face.

"You have a revolver, young senor, perhaps you'll let me see what you can do."

"Not after your exhibition."

"I thought I heard a revolver shot from this place awhile ago."

"You did. I fired it."

"At what, pray?"

"At that snake," said Jack, pointing.

"You took its head off, I perceive. An excellent shot even at close range. It is a dama blanca, the most venomous reptile of Mexico. You did well to kill it for had it struck you, a third person would have been needed to guard the ore trains of La Rosas mine on their way to Guaymas, which would be a great pity."

Again the sarcastic inflection in his tones.

"It was not within striking distance of me, but of the senorita."

"What!" exclaimed the Spaniard, his manner suddenly changing. "Is that true, Mercedes?"

"Si, mia padre (Yes, my father). He saved my life."

"Senor, you have placed me under the deepest of obligations to you," said the Spaniard, seizing Jack by the hand. "I assure you I shall not forget it. My child, my Mercedes, is the apple of my eye. In saving her life you have put your—but no matter. We shall meet again, I trust, young senor. You will honor my hacienda with your presence at an early date, I hope."

"I will endeavor to do so if you will tell me where it is."

"I will send a carriage to fetch you in a week, perhaps, when you have got settled at the mine. Till then I wish you adios (farewell)."

"Adios, senor," said Jack, acknowledging the Spaniard's courtly bow by lifting his hat in American style.

"Bid the senor goodbye, Mercedes, and follow me," said her father, stepping into the bushes after regaining his jeweled dagger.

The girl was all sunshine now.

"Senor Jack, I shall not forget what I owe you," she said, stepping up to him and offering her shapely hand. "We shall meet again soon."

"I hope so, senorita, for it will be a great pleasure for me to do so," said the plucky young American.

"Ah, senor Jack, you do not know what a load is off my mind. I no longer fear you will encounter danger that you cannot protect yourself against."

She flashed him one bewitching look and springing into the bushes was gone, and with her going Jack felt that the day had lost some of its brightness.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AT THEIR JOURNEY'S END.

Bob had remained in the background during the whole of the interview Jack had had with Mercedes and her father.

He now came forward.

"Bless me, Bob, I forgot all about you," said Jack.

"I don't wonder with such a pretty girl to talk to. Who was the gent who came out of the bushes and did the crack shooting?"

"The young lady's father."

"You don't say. He's a fine-looking man all right."

"Yes. He's a Spaniard, not a Mexican. He has invited me to call at his hacienda. Going to send a rig for me after I get settled at the mine."

"You're in luck. I'll have to pick up the Spanish lingo



if I remain in this country, otherwise I might as well be on an uninhabited island."

While talking the boys were retracing their steps back through the defile.

They now came in sight of the village.

They had been away from the inn considerably more than an hour, and they calculated that dinner was ready by this time.

And they were fully ready for their dinner.

When they reached the inn they found a table set for them under the shade of a spreading tree, and they sat down and were immediately served by the landlord himself.

They ate the meal leisurely, and during it Jack told his chum a part of what had passed between Mercedes and himself, and all that her father said, so far as he could remember.

Before the boys had finished, Bruno brought the rig out of the yard and appeared to be ready to proceed on the last lap of the journey.

The ride to Real del Monte was accomplished inside of two hours, and the boys were set down at the door of Mr. Winter's residence.

The general manager was at the mines, but they were welcomed by Mrs. Winter and her pretty daughter.

Jack was expected, but not Bob.

Mrs. Winter, however, supposed that her husband had not been advised of the coming of the latter, and made him as welcome as Jack.

After a short conversation, Jack explained that his chum, not relishing the idea of parting from him, had followed him to Yuma on his own responsibility, and he had brought him the rest of the way, hoping that Mr. Winter would find something for him to do at the mine.

Mrs. Winter replied that their countrymen were so few in that locality that her husband would be very glad to have Bob with him at the mine, though he had come to that neighborhood without authority.

The house while only one story was quite a good-sized residence, being built about an open space, or garden, something after the style of a hacienda.

This open space, which of course had no roof, was called a patio, and was shaded by tall pecan trees, underneath which were set rustic seats.

The outside of the cottage was whitewashed, being built of stone, and the windows were shaded with bright green blinds.

Mrs. Winter seemed quite contented there, but whether her daughter was or not did not appear till the boys came to know her better.

At any rate one thing was clear, Miss Clara Winter was delighted to have two good-looking American boys to converse with.

She had already made some progress in the Spanish language, as she found that necessary in a part of Mexico where very little English was spoken, and when she mentioned the fact Jack thought he'd see how she was getting on in it.

She readily understood what he said, and replied fairly well, but she soon broke off, saying she much preferred to use her native tongue.

Jack laughed, and after that the conversation continued in English.

Clara and the two boys were getting on swimmingly together when Mr. Winter returned from the mine.

He welcomed Jack heartily, but was manifestly surprised to see Bob.

Jack explained why his chum was there, and said he hoped that Mr. Winter would not be put out by his coming, but find a job for him at the mine, since he and Bob were such warm friends and companions that they really wished to be together.

The general manager laughed and said that would be all right.

"I know Bob, and always liked him in 'Frisco, so, on the whole, I am rather pleased to have him here," he said. "I'll make it all right with Pickering, and will manage to find something for our young friend to do."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," said Bob. "It was rather cheeky of me to follow Jack, and try to force myself on your consideration, but I couldn't help it."

"The fact is, Bob wanted to help run down the Crimson Mask bandits," laughed Jack.

At the mention of the rascals the manager's face clouded.

"The scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "They murdered poor Smith. You will have to look out for yourself, my lad, for the duty of conveying the ore to Guaymas will devolve on you."

"Can't I go with Jack? We've provided ourselves with first-class magazine rifles on purpose to protect the train," said Bob.

"I should hardly like to expose both of you to the same peril," replied Mr. Winter.

"What's the difference, sir?" said Bob. "I'm here on my own responsibility, and if anything happens to me it is not up to you."

"That's a poor argument. Still I'll consider the matter, for it might be safer for both if two went than one."

"That's the way we've been figuring it, sir," said Jack.

He then told Mr. Winter about his meeting with Senorita Castilano and her father in the mountain glen near the village of Rio Chico, where they stopped that day for dinner.

The manager was quite interested.

"He is called Don Castilano in his neighborhood, and is said to be a hidalgo of rank in Spain, but banished from the country for some political offense. I know very little about him, having met him only once, and that was the other day just before I sent out that ill-starred convoy in the defence of which against the bandits Smith met his death," he said. "He seemed to be much interested in the fact that I was shipping silver ore to the States, and asked me how the train was protected. As the bandits had not been seen on this side of the Sierra Madre, because, I suppose, all the other mine owners, who are Mexicans, send their ore east to Chihuahua, I did not look for the rascals to bother with our small output. I therefore told him that I did not think the train would require any special protection. That Mr. Smith and the peons would take care of it."

"How did the peons behave when attacked by the bandits?" asked Jack.

"Very badly, I understand. It was wholly through their cowardice that Smith lost his life. Had they put up a



good front the rascals might have been beaten off, for Smith was a fighter."

"I suppose you have notified the authorities of this State about the attack."

"Yes, but we Americans do not get a whole lot of sympathy from the Mexicans. I was told that a detachment of soldiers would be sent from the Guaymas garrison, but they haven't showed up as yet."

"Mr. Pickering was awfully mad when he got your telegram concerning the outrage. He said he was going to appeal to the Secretary of State."

"That will simply mean a lot of red tape and nothing done. We have got to protect ourselves."

"Bob and I will do our share, sir."

Jack told Mr. Winter that Don Castilano had invited him to his hacienda, and would send a rig for him in a week or so.

"Well, you can go, of course, for you seem to be the only person in this vicinity whom the Don has taken friendly notice of. I suppose that is because you saved his daughter from the bite of the dama blanca, which would have killed her according to the reptile's reputation. They say that no one bitten by that snake has ever survived."

"Then I hope I do not run across any more of the species," said Jack.

"I trust you won't, as it probably would cut short your usefulness quicker than the bandits."

At this point the evening meal was announced and all hands adjourned to the dining-room.

The evening was spent by the boys in strolling around the village with Clara.

On their return they were shown to a large airy chamber, looking out on the back garden.

"When you get up in the morning I advise you lads to shake out your clothes and your shoes before putting them on," said Mr. Winter.

"Why so?" asked Bob.

"To get rid of any stray centipedes that might fancy to lodge in them during the night."

"Gosh! Are those things so plentiful as that?"

"There are quite a few around, and their bite is unpleasant. They sting with their tail. We are accustomed to them, and they don't bother us much. Sometimes I step on half a dozen in a day, at other times I don't notice one for several days."

"Why don't they stop out of doors where they belong?" growled Bob.

"It's hard to say why they don't," laughed the manager; "but I guess they think they own the country and all that is in it. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, sir," said Jack, and soon afterwards the boys turned in.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BROTHERHOOD OF SAN PEDRO.

Bob was very careful to look the floor over before he turned out of bed next morning, for he had no mind to place his bare feet on a centipede.

Then he shook his clothes out carefully one by one and put them on.

Finally he did the same to his shoes.

No centipede rewarded his efforts, and he was not sorry.

Jack followed the same tactics, but not so carefully, and the boys presented themselves in the patio.

Finding no one up, or at least around, but the servants, they walked out front.

A light breeze was stirring, and though warm the morning was unusually charming.

They strolled around a portion of the village, flirted with two or three pretty señoritas engaged in their morning avocations, and then returned to the house to find the family in the patio, and breakfast ready to be served.

Soon after the meal the peon servants brought out three saddle horses.

"I suppose you boys can ride some," said Mr. Winter. "At any rate you can't very well fall off these Mexican saddles, and you will soon get accustomed to riding."

"I can ride," replied Jack, "and I believe Bob can, too, though I never saw him on a horse."

"The only thing I can ride is a hobby," grinned Bob.

"As your hobby at present is the annihilation of bandits, a la Bertram, you'll find it necessary to acquire horsemanship," laughed Jack.

Bob was helped into the saddle, where he felt strange and looked foolish.

Jack needed no help, and the party set off at an easy pace to accommodate Bob.

Bassett clung on to the pommel with the tenacity of a drowning man to the proverbial straw, and the motion of his animal bounced him up and down.

Jack and Mr. Winter accommodated their bodies to the movements of the animals, thereby dispensing with the jolting that Bob received, and which subsequently made sitting down as uncomfortable as if he had received corporeal punishment in the old-fashioned style.

In due time they covered the five miles between the village and the mine, and Bob, with many grimaces, dismounted with his companions.

They were introduced to several Mexican employees, and then taken into the mine, through a series of long galleries on a level with the entrance.

There was no shaft extending downward as in most American mines, where the ore is hoisted to the surface in steel buckets by machinery.

The main tunnel went straight into the mountain, like a railroad one, and from it branched off smaller tunnels and galleries, on either side, all connecting one with the other.

Where the ore had been dug out by previous owners were rugged chambers of different sizes, according as the ore lode spread.

Some of these were of such a solid character that the roof and sides required no shoring timbers.

As modern drills had not been used the amount of labor to get out the ore must have been tremendous—but then labor is cheap in Mexico, and where it is paid for out of the product of the mine itself the owners regarded it lightly so long as results are satisfactory.

At the time of our story, however, American hand and



steam drills were being used in all the mines of the country, and naturally more progress was made and a far larger output secured.

The boys were greatly interested in the La Rosas mine, and particularly that section of it where the work was going on.

Mr. Winter understood his business thoroughly, and he was using up-to-date methods as far as he was able to command them.

As soon as he had thoroughly tested the lode he discovered, and found it as stable as it seemed to promise, he intended to introduce the steam drill.

At present matters were, to a certain extent, in the experimental stage.

"In a few days I shall have 150 bags of ore ready for shipment," said the manager, "and I shall send it without delay to Guaymas. I might even go along with you boys to make sure that it gets in safety to the Gulf."

"You have no idea what became of the bandits after looting the last train?" said Jack.

"One of the peons who ran away at the time of the attack told me that they disappeared with the mules in the direction of the range of Rio Chico," replied Winter. "I do not imagine that they are hiding there, though. It is probable that they skirted the mountains and then made for the Sierra Madre, in the fastnesses of which it is suspected they have their rendezvous. From all accounts they seem to have stolen more than 1,000 bags of silver ore, some of it of especial richness. Our mine would seem to be the least productive for them when there are so many richer ones in the neighborhood."

The manager did not assign the boys to any branch of work that day, and around noon he told them they could ride back to the house and rest themselves.

They were glad to take advantage of his permission, and off they set for the village.

During the ride, Jack gave Bob some instructions in horseback riding, and they reached the house in time for the light midday meal.

Later on Clara had her pony saddled and proposed that the boys accompany her on a trip around the country.

Jack had no objections, but Bob had.

However, he wouldn't stay behind, for he had no way of amusing himself, so he accompanied the others.

He felt like a wreck when they got back several hours later.

"Holy smoke! But I'm sore," he said to Jack, as he deposited himself on a settee in the patio in such a gingerly way as to provoke a loud chuckle from his chum.

"What are you laughing at?" said Bob.

"You. One would think you had suddenly become brittle from the way you sit down," replied Jack.

"Well, if you felt as I do you'd want a cushion."

"I guess I can get you one, but it will give you away."

"Don't disturb yourself. I can stand it."

"When you start for the mine in the morning you'll think you're riding a redhot stove," grinned Jack.

"If I don't feel any better than I do now I won't go to the mine."

"You'll do as you are told, I guess. You're under salary and have got to earn it. Aren't you sorry you didn't stay in 'Frisco?"

"No, I ain't."

"You'll miss your stories down here."

"I can get along without them."

"Maybe you expect to turn out the hero of adventures with the bandits that will knock what you've read silly."

"Stop your joshing. Here comes Miss Clara."

"Then look pleasant or she'll think you're a grouchy chap."

"Now that you boys are here I may get a chance to visit the old church and monastery of San Pedro," said Miss Winter.

"The old church of San Pedro! Where is that?" asked Jack.

"Near the village of San Pedro, about twenty miles from here. It adjoins an ancient monastery built, and for a very long time occupied, by a religious order called the Brotherhood of San Pedro. The order is out of existence, but the monastery remains, a venerable ruin except the quarters of the priests who officiate at the church. The village, church and monastery stand in a wild and romantic part of the mountain range, and are well worth a visit."

"You can count on us, Miss Clara. Nothing would suit Bob better than to ride over there and back to-morrow. That would be just forty miles, and would use up a day nicely at a smart gait," and Jack gave his chum a sly look.

Bob felt like punching him.

"Although we've been here several months I never could get my father to take me there, and I'm just dying to go. Do you know there's a strange legend about that church."

"Is there?" said Jack.

"Yes. They say that during the time the Brotherhood lived at the monastery they accumulated a large store of pure silver which they melted into ingots and hid in the vaults of the church."

"They found and worked a mine, I suppose, in the mountains."

"I did not hear that they had anything to do with a mine. It is said that in their time all the ornaments of the church were of pure silver, and that all the plates and vessels used by them in the monastery were of silver, too."

"What become of those articles when the Brotherhood went out of existence?"

"No one knows. They disappeared."

"Were the church vaults searched for the alleged treasure?"

"Yes, but it was never found."

"Then I guess the legend doesn't amount to much."

"I don't know. The people of the village roundabout all believe that the silver treasure is really hidden in the church."

"Why don't they keep on searching for it, then?"

"They wouldn't dare penetrate those vaults. They would regard it as a sacrilege, for the bones of most of the Brotherhood are buried there."

"Then who was it that searched unsuccessfully for the silver?"

"The State authorities did on two or three occasions."

"When they need money, I suppose. If I thought there was anything in the yarn I'd go and hunt for it myself on the quiet, with Bob, if he'd join me."

"I'm afraid you wouldn't have much chance. The priests are in charge of the old church, and if they caught



you in it, except as a worshipper, they'd make a time about it."

And if we were lucky enough to find the treasure they'd stop us from taking it away, eh?"

"Indeed they would. The whole village of San Pedro would turn out to help them."

"If we visit the church, as you propose, will we be permitted to inspect the vaults?"

"Oh, dear, I wouldn't go down into those musty cellars for the world," said the girl, with a little shudder. "Why they are nothing but a kind of underground cemetery. There must be more than 200 of the Brotherhood moldering away there."

"They must be buried one on top of the other; but I don't suppose the coffins are in sight. I'm not afraid of dead men. They're not dangerous at all. It is live rascals, like the Crimson Mask band, who are to be avoided."

"I've heard people talk that way before," laughed the girl, "and discovered they were afraid to pass a lonesome churchyard at night."

"Well, Miss Clara, if you fear that the spirits of the moldy Brotherhood would get away with me you had better not dare to venture into those vaults. If I believed there was a treasure there nothing would stop me from trying to get at it. To prove to you that I'm not a coward, I'll make a trip to that old church some night and bring away a coffin plate if I can find one, or a piece of a broken coffin."

"You wouldn't do any such thing," said Clara, incredulously.

"Do you dare me to do it some time?"

"I'm afraid you'd never come back."

The entrance of Mr. Winter put a stop to the talk about the church of San Pedro, and soon afterward dinner was announced.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CRIMSON MASK AND HIS BAND.

A week passed away, during which Jack and Bob got well acquainted with the mine as well as the village of Real del Monte.

Then Mr. Winter announced that on the following day 160 bags of silver ore would be shipped to San Francisco, via Guaymas.

They were to go in two lots of eighty bags each, on the backs of forty mules, and Jack was to be in charge of the convoy, with Bob as his second in command.

Jack received full instructions as to the delivery of the ore in Guaymas, and after he had made the first trip he was to bring the mules back at once and start out on the second.

A force of fifteen peons, armed with Mexican muskets, was to accompany the boys, to look after the mules and to protect the ore in case of a bandit attack.

Jack and Bob would carry their rifles, so that the convoy, as far as appearances went, at any rate, was quite a formidable one.

The convoy that went out under Smith, and was looted, consisted of sixty mules with 120 bags of ore and fifteen peons.

Only four of the peons carried muskets, while Smith had only a pair of Colt's revolvers.

They were attacked about dark midway between Rio Chico and another small village to the west.

"From the most reliable accounts the bandit band does not number much over a dozen men," said the general manager to Jack. "With the force and the arms you have at your command you ought to foil any attack that might be made on the train. It is my opinion you will not be molested, for the bandits are probably informed of the strength of the convoy."

"What makes you think they are wise to our arrangements?" asked Jack.

"I suspect they have spies at all the mines. Peons, for instance, whom they have won over to their interests."

"It wouldn't be good for the traitor that I found in our ranks," said Jack, in a determined tone. "I think I'd hang him to the nearest tree as an example."

"I wouldn't blame you if you did. A traitor is entitled to no consideration, and a firm hand is the best thing under perilous circumstances."

It was decided to start from the mine as early as possible and get beyond the danger zone during daylight.

Accordingly, after an early breakfast Mr. Winter, Jack and Bob rode out to the mine, where they found the mules and the peons already assembled.

The bags were quickly bound on the mules, and the start made at once.

At Real del Monte four mules laden with provisions were taken on, and then the convoy continued on the road to Rio Chico.

When within a mile of that hamlet a single horseman was declared approaching from the mountains.

He proved to be a Mexican of sinister aspect, and was armed with a rifle and a pair of revolvers.

He asked for Senor Jack Redwood.

"That's my name," said Jack, who, with Bob, was riding at the head of the line.

Then, senor, this note is for you."

Handing it to the boy, he wheeled his horse and started off.

Hold on," shouted Jack. "Come back here."

But the horseman paid not the slightest attention to his words.

Nothing but a rifle shot would have stopped him, and Jack did not feel that he could proceed to such an extreme as that, though he strongly suspected that the messenger came from the Crimson Mask.

Such proved to be the case when he opened the note and read the following:

"Senor Redwood—I am fully acquainted with everything connected with your convoy—its apparent strength and its actual weakness. Look to the muskets of your men, as well as to the rifles of yourself and companion, and you will understand how completely you are at my mercy if I chose to attack you. But be not afraid. A more potent power protects you than powder and ball. What that power is I may not say. It is enough for you to know



that you are safe. Go your way in peace. I accord you the right of way. Not only now, but at all times.

"CRIMSON MASK."

Jack was fairly staggered by the contents of the note.

With a feeling of uneasiness he cocked his rifle and pulled the trigger.

There was a snap and nothing more.

He threw out the cartridge and examined it.

It had been tampered with and was useless.

Every other cartridge in the magazine was in the same condition.

Bob looked on until he comprehended the situation and then found all the cartridges in his own weapon to be out of commission.

"Who in thunder has done this?" he exclaimed.

"We have one or more enemies in our ranks, that is clear," replied Jack.

He pulled out his revolver and found the same condition there.

He took a musket from the nearest peon and examined the cartridge in it.

It couldn't be fired in a thousand years.

The Crimson Mask had spoken the truth—the convoy was powerless to resist an attack.

Jack took a long breath and his eyes instinctively wandered in the direction taken by the messenger.

Across the valley were approaching at full gallop a body of men.

"Gee! I see our finish," said Bob. "We'll have to give up the mules, for here come the bandits as certain as eggs are eggs."

Jack bit his lips.

There was absolutely nothing to do.

They could not resist with clubbed guns, for the rascals would simply hold a short distance aloof and pick them off at their ease if he refused to surrender.

The horsemen rode up to within a hundred yards and then stopped.

At their head was a stalwart figure across whose eyes was drawn a crimson mask.

The band consisted of sixteen men, and the majority were hard-looking chaps, who would not have disgraced a pirate ship.

The Crimson Mask made a gesture and they spread themselves out.

Another gesture and fifteen rifles were raised, pointed heavenward and discharged.

The Crimson Mask then removed his sombrero and made a bow toward Jack.

Swinging his horse he darted off the way he came, and his band followed in his tracks.

The convoy had instinctively come to a halt, and every man, as well as the two boys, had watched the movements of the bandit band with beating hearts.

They watched them depart and gradually disappear in the distance with feelings it would be hard to describe.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" cried Bob. "If this doesn't beat the Dutch then I don't know what I'm talking about."

Jack said nothing, but started his horse on, and the convoy behind him got in motion again and proceeded on its way.

"Say, what do you s'pose this means?" asked Bob.

"Read the letter from the Crimson Mask. The facts seem to be exactly as set forth in it. We are helpless yet are promised safety and the right of way. It is not according to bandit procedure to let a sure thing get away, and yet such seems to be the case in this instance. It is a great mystery to me. As much so as is the real identity of the Crimson Mask himself," said Jack.

Bob read the letter.

He certainly has us down fine," he said. "What does he mean by saying that a more potent power protects us than powder and ball?"

"How can I tell you? I'm not a mind reader."

"It's mighty queer. Maybe we have some kind of a mascot with us, like a rabbit's foot, that he's afraid of? The Mexicans are very superstitious, you know."

"No; I don't believe it's anything like that. It would take something stronger than a charm to hold off a bunch of bandits from an easy snap."

"Then I give it up," said Bob, handing the letter back.

In a short time the convoy reached Rio Chico and lined up before the inn.

Jack bought wine for his men, and non-alcoholic drink for himself and Bob.

The village was named after a small river on which the hamlet stood.

It was crossed by a wooden bridge, and over this the train presently took its way.

About an hour later they reached another village and stopped for more drink and a brief rest.

Eight miles further on they crossed the Rio Yaqui, by fording, and camped on the other side for dinner.

After an hour's rest they proceeded to San Jose, and thence to Bonancita, twenty miles further, where they put up for the night at the inn.

The pretty senorita seemed delighted to see Jack and Bob again, and hung around the table when she served them with supper, talking glibly with the former and making googoo eyes at the latter.

In the morning the convoy resumed its journey.

The second night was passed in a small village on the Matape River, and they reached Guaymas after dark on the third day.

Jack turned the bags of ore over to Mr. Winter's agent, and next morning his party started on their return journey to Real del Monte, where they duly arrived.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE RIDE TO SAN PEDRO.

Mr. Winter had already been informed by a note from Jack, sent by a messenger from Rio Chico, of their meeting with the Crimson Mask, but beyond intimating that they had not been molested, he inclosed no particulars.

When the mule train returned to Real del Monte the first thing the general manager did was to congratulate Jack on having carried the convoy through in safety and with dispatch.

"I got your note," he said, "saying that you met the



bandits and were not interfered with. I guess the Crimson Mask was shy of attacking you when he saw you were well prepared to receive him."

"That's where you're wrong, Mr. Winter. We were in worse shape than Mr. Smith was to stand them off," replied Jack.

"Why, what do you mean?" said the manager, in surprise. "A dozen of the peons carried muskets, while you boys had your rifles, and a revolver apiece."

"Yes, I know it, but they were of no more use to us than wooden dummies."

"I don't understand you."

"Every cartridge we had had been tampered with. Not one could be fired."

"What!" gasped Mr. Winter.

"See for yourself. There are the cartridges I took out of the magazine of my rifle. They are centerfire ones. The fulminating caps have been removed."

We will state here that this could not have happened with the present style of cartridge in use to-day; but the events described in this story took place years ago.

"How in thunder did this happen?" asked Mr. Winter.

"That's what I would like to know. We have traitors in camp, and the damage was done before we set out."

"But how could any emissary of the bandits have got hold of your rifle and Bob's? You kept them in your room."

"Somebody must have got in there during the night, while we were asleep. This was not a difficult matter with the windows open."

"Well, this is serious and must be investigated."

"I don't think it will happen again if there is any faith to be put in the word of the Crimson Mask, whose actions towards us, I must say, were very extraordinary."

"What do you mean?"

"Prior to the appearance of the rascals a single horseman rode up to the head of the train, asked for me, and after handing me a note, retreated the way he came. Here is the note. Read it and see what you can make out of it. It is Greek to me."

Mr. Winter read the note.

"Most extraordinary," he said.

"It certainly is. The actions of the band were in perfect keeping with it," and Jack described the approach of the bandits, their salute and their retreat.

"I'm bound to say that the conduct of the Crimson Mask and his followers is past my comprehension. If he holds to his word we shall have no further trouble in sending our ore to Guaymas; but I suspect there is some ruse behind it. I shall continue to take the same precautions, and we will make sure before you start again in the morning that all your weapons are in working order."

Nothing else was talked of at the dinner table but the trip to Guaymas, and the peculiar incident connected with it.

Next morning the second convoy started out, and as they approached Rio Chico the two boys kept a sharp lookout for the bandits.

They did not appear, and the train proceeded to Guaymas without incident.

When the boys returned to Real del Monte they heard

that an ore train on the eastern side of the Sierra Madre had been attacked and captured.

The Crimson Mask had evidently been at work on his former stamping-grounds.

The boys had been three weeks in Mexico, and there was hardly an hour during that time in which Jack had not thought of Mercedes Castilano.

He wondered when her father was going to send for him to pay the anticipated visit at his hacienda.

Jack hoped that the don had not gone back on the arrangement, for he was eager to meet the Spanish beauty again.

He believed she would be delighted to see him also.

A meeting between them depended wholly on her father's pleasure, however, and until the promised vehicle was sent the boy felt he could do nothing.

The Winter family and the two boys were at breakfast on the third Sunday morning of Jack and Bob's advent into Mexico when, during a break in the conversation, Miss Clara said:

"Father, have you any objections to my going to San Pedro to-day with Jack and Bob to see the church and monastery of the Brotherhood?"

"Hum! That's a long horseback ride—all of forty miles there and back. Do you think you could stand the trip?"

"I'll stand anything for the pleasure of looking at those ancient edifices," she answered. "We ought to be able to make the trip inside of three hours, put in an hour seeing the sights, another at dinner at the village inn, which we can order on our arrival, and then three more on the road back. That will be eight hours. If we start right away, we should be back before dark."

"And your escorts—have they consented to undertake this trip?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack. "We three talked it over last night, and it was decided to go if you had no insurmountable objection."

"Oh, very well. I place my daughter in your care, and I have no doubt that you will bring her home safe and sound," said the general manager.

"Yes, sir, we'll look after her," said Bob, who was somewhat smitten with the young lady, though she, on her part, divided her smiles equally between the boys.

A peon was called and received his orders.

Clara retired to her room to put on her riding dress, while the boys strolled outside to await the bringing-up of the stout pony and two horses.

"Don't you think we'd better carry our revolvers?" said Bob.

"Now that would look well on Sunday, wouldn't it?" said Jack. "There isn't any danger, or Mr. Winter would have vetoed the arrangement offhand."

"We might meet the Crimson Mask and his band."

"If we did, a couple of revolvers wouldn't do us a whole lot of good; but there is little danger of that. They are doubtless twenty or thirty miles to the northeast in the Sierra Madre. It is only a few days ago that they pillaged that ore train on the other side of the range, and retreated with the spoils to their rendezvous, which everybody agrees is in some inaccessible part of the mountains where the soldiers couldn't find them a couple of months ago when they were scouring the district," said Jack.



"All right," said Bob. "I only offered the suggestion."  
 "I applaud your foresight, only it's unnecessary in this case."

"San Pedro is about five miles north of Rio Chico, Miss Clara said.

"Something like that."

"In the same mountains that we paid the brief visit to that day."

"Yes. The glen with the waterfall is at the extreme southern end of the range."

"Don Castilano's hacienda is somewhere between those two villages, don't you think?"

"I'll be hanged if I know where it is. I wish I did."

"Kind of funny that the Don didn't keep his word to send for you. He and his daughter are under great obligations to you."

"There must be a good reason for his not doing so, for he is surely a gentleman, if I ever met one. I am satisfied that I shall hear from him, for Spaniards of standing are very scrupulous about their honor, and wouldn't break their word under any circumstances. Probably he thinks it best to let me get accustomed to my new surroundings before he arranges for the visit."

"We might pass his hacienda on our way to San Pedro without knowing it."

"It is quite possible, but even if I knew the place I would not venture to call there on my own responsibility."

"I should think you'd take a long chance for the pleasure of meeting his daughter again. You appear to be dead gone on her," grinned Bob.

"How do you know that I'm dead gone on her?" asked Jack, with a flush.

"For reasons. Besides, you're blushing like a full-blown sunset now."

"Get out."

The simultaneous appearance of the horses and Miss Clara put an end to the discussion; the party mounted and, waving their adieus to Mr. and Mrs. Winter, took the road leading to Rio Chico.

There was no danger of their missing the way, for when they got in sight of Rio Chico all they had to do was to turn and ride north parallel with the mountains till they came to a broad opening in the range.

Riding up into this they would presently see the village of San Pedro nestling within, and the church and monastery on the heights beyond.

In less than two hours after leaving the house they discovered Rio Chico ahead.

"We have made pretty good time," said Jack. "You are a fine rider, Miss Clara."

"I dearly love to ride, and as I have been in the habit of going out nearly every day since we came here, I ought to be a fair rider by this time. Practice makes perfect, you know," she laughed.

"Bob has rounded to pretty well for a fellow who never rode anything wilder than the untamed goat on which he was initiated into the secret order of the Knights of Coveo," chuckled Jack.

"Do you belong to a secret order, Mr. Bassett?" asked Clara, with a look of interest. "It must be great fun to be initiated. I've heard my father say that he was obliged to ride a goat when he joined the Masons."

"No, Miss Clara, I don't belong to any secret order. That was just one of Jack's jokes," said Bob.

"Aren't you just horrid, Jack Redwood!" cried the girl, with a pout.

"I'm anything you say, Miss Clara. I wouldn't dispute your word for the world," said Jack. "We'll turn off the road here, I guess."

In half an hour they were riding up toward the opening beyond which was San Pedro.

They had nearly reached it when a black horse flashed into sight, ridden by a female.

She was approaching at a fast gallop, which showed she was an accomplished equestrian.

Suddenly Jack felt a thrill run through his blood.

His sharp eyes had recognized the fair rider as Mercedes Castilano.

## CHAPTER X.

### WHAT JACK SAID TO MERCEDES.

A moment later Bob identified her.

"Gosh! It's the Spanish girl, Mercedes, Jack," he exclaimed.

"Why, do you know that young lady?" asked Clara, with a tinge of jealousy, for she saw that the rider was more than ordinarily charming.

"No, but Jack does. She's the girl he saved from the snake, don't you remember?" said Bob.

The fair Spaniard seemed to have recognized her preserver in the party of three, for she reined in her steed, which was a magnificent animal, and came on with less speed.

On the impulse of the moment Jack started ahead of his party to meet her.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Senorita Mercedes," he said, raising his hat.

"Why, Senor Jack, what brings you here?" cried Mercedes, with a bewitching smile that completed Jack's enslavement. "I am so glad to see you."

They halted and she offered her hand.

"My friend and I are escorting Miss Winter, the daughter of our employer, on a flying visit to the church and monastery of San Pedro. We have heard it is something worth seeing," said Jack.

The smile faded out of Mercedes's face and she looked serious.

"I am sorry you are going there," she said, "for you will be disappointed if you expect to go through the monastery. It is possible you may be permitted to see the church. As a rule no one but the priest and his assistant enters the building except in the morning when mass is read, or in the evening at vespers; as for the monastery, it is wholly closed to visitors."

"That is too bad. Miss Winter will be greatly disappointed, for she, more than Bob and I, undertook this round trip of forty miles to see both buildings. Come, I will introduce you to her, and also to my chum."

Mercedes showed no eagerness for the introduction.

She saw that Clara was pretty and shapely, and perhaps



she was not pleased to find Senor Jack, who was never out of her thoughts, in her company.

But she went forward with Jack to the spot where Bob and Clara had stopped.

"Miss Winter, this is Senorita Castilano," said Jack, in Spanish.

Clara bowed in a friendly way, but the Spanish girl acknowledged the introduction in a well bred but haughty manner, taking in the fair American with a rapid sweep of her beautiful eyes.

Jack told Clara what Mercedes had said about the impossibility of inspecting either the monastery or the church, and the American girl showed great disappointment, just as the boy expected she would.

Mercedes admitted that it was a pity, and then invited the party to visit her father's hacienda, which was on the mountainside overlooking the village.

Jack accepted on behalf of himself and his friends, then he and Mercedes, riding together, took the lead in to the secluded valley.

Mercedes told him that her father would have kept his promise to send a carriage for him but for the fact that he had been away a considerable part of the time.

He was now at the hacienda and had told her he intended to send for Senor Jack on the following day.

"It isn't necessary for your father to send for me," said Jack. "I can ride over here myself just as well as not."

"But now that you are here you will stay, will you not?" said Mercedes.

"It would give me great pleasure to do so if I could; but I must return with my friend Bob and Miss Winter, as I am partly responsible for her safe return."

Mercedes looked disappointed.

"Senorita Winter, you like her very much, is it not so?" she said, looking steadily at Jack.

"She is a very nice girl, and of course I like her; but I like somebody else better."

"Somebody else!" exclaimed Mercedes, with a flash in her eyes. "Ah, you then have a sweetheart in the States?"

"No. I have no sweetheart. The only girl I care for in the world thinks of me only as a friend."

"And who is she?"

Jack shook his head.

"You will not tell me, Senor Jack?" with a jealous flash.

"No; it is impossible."

Mercedes became silent and constrained, and they rode in silence for a few moments.

"Have I offended you, Senorita Mercedes?" he said at length.

"Oh, no; it is nothing to me, this girl that you care for. She does not interest me in the least," she replied, drawing herself up with all the pride of her race. "Let us talk about something else."

Jack, however, saw that her manner had suddenly grown cold and distant, and his face reflected his own feelings.

He made no effort to talk about something else, and so they rode along without a word, while Bob and Clara laughed and chatted behind them.

In a minute or two the village of San Pedro burst upon their view.

It was only a small collection of one-story houses and thatched hovels, in all not more than fifty or sixty.

They stood in picturesque confusion on the left slope of the range, and overflowed into the narrow valley.

On the right was a long, rambling building of two-stories, partly hidden by a cactus grove, and flanked by many small one-story buildings on the slope behind it, the whole collection sleeping peacefully in the sunshine.

This was the hacienda.

Straight ahead was the church, of so pretentious an appearance that it looked out of place in such humble surroundings; while above and behind it towered the monastery of the Brotherhood of San Pedro, built solidly of stone, and bearing every trace of its 150 years of existence.

The scene itself was one well worth coming some distance to gaze on, and Clara uttered an exclamation of admiration.

But as her eyes rested on the church and the monastery, her disappointment was increased when she reflected that the interiors were closed to strangers.

Bob and Clara gazed around with interested attention, but to Jack the scene might have been a blank wall for all the pleasure he took in it.

Bob noticed his solemn look.

"What's the matter, old man?" he asked. "You look as if you had just lost your best friend."

"Don't worry about me," replied his chum, sharply.

Bob knew that something was the matter, and he laid the change in Jack's manner to something that had taken place between him and Mercedes.

He saw that his chum was in no humor to be twitted, so he prudently held his tongue.

The party had stopped for a moment, and then Mercedes and Jack again went on in advance.

"Senorita Mercedes, I have certainly offended you," began Jack.

"Not in the least," she answered with a short laugh that sounded harshly on his ears. "I could not be offended at anything you said. Do I not owe my life to you?"

Her voice broke into a momentary softness.

"Please do not refer to that," he said earnestly. "I only did my duty. Anybody would have done the same for you. But in meeting you I have lost something that—well, what's the use of talking? It would not interest you to know. I suppose I can stand it. At any rate I'll have to."

The tone of his voice caused her to regard him intently.

"What did you lose, Senor Jack?" she asked.

"I can't tell you any more than I could answer your other questions," he said.

"Is it very valuable this thing that you have lost?" she asked.

"I would rather not discuss it."

"I am sorry, Senor Jack, that is saving my life you should lose something you think so much of," in a tone of sympathy. "You have hunted for it and could not find it. Ah, if I knew what it was I would look for it for you. I would not rest till I had found it."

Jack remained silent.

"Won't you tell me what it is?" she said, laying her hand on his arm.

"I wish I could, but—I dare not."

"Dare not, Senor Jack," she exclaimed, opening her eyes in surprise.



"No, I haven't the nerve."

"And yet you dared tell my father to his face that—" she stopped abruptly and with a kind of startled confusion.

"I don't understand you, Senorita Mercedes."

She uttered a little forced laugh.

"It is nothing. See, yonder comes my father. He will be surprised to see you, but none the less glad. It is a pity that you cannot stay with us now. Perhaps my father can arrange to send some one in your place with your friend Senorita Winter so that they will surely get back home in safety."

"Do you wish me to stay, very much?"

"Why what a question, Senor Jack," she cried, with a vivid blush. "Do you not believe I do?"

"I should be very glad to know that you did. I should be very happy to feel that my company was half as welcome to you as yours is to me."

"Ah, Senor Jack!" blushed Mercedes. "You must not say that to me. It is not fair to the only girl you care for in all the world."

"Why not," he replied, in sudden desperation, "when that girl is—you. There, you have forced the secret from me, and if I have offended you I can't help it. I have loved you from the first moment I looked at you. It was my heart I lost in the glen of the waterfall, and you have it in your keeping. You may not want it, it is true, but I can no more help loving you than yonder sun can help shining in a clear sky. If I could win you I'd be the happiest boy in the world; but I have no such expectations. You are the only daughter of a proud Spanish Don, while I—well, I'm nobody but a plain American boy, with my fortune to carve through my own efforts. Now you know the truth, and I hope I have not offended you."

Mercedes did not reply.

She could not, for her own heart was in a tumult.

Her whole nature thrilled as he acknowledged he loved her.

The emotions of her young heart painted her cheeks with a hue that vied with the reddest rose that ever grew.

And she was happy—happier at that moment than she had ever been in her life, for she had loved Senor Jack at first sight, and now she knew he loved her.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AT SAN PEDRO.

And so they rode forward side by side, without exchanging another word until they halted before Don Castilano, who recognized Jack with not a little surprise.

"Welcome, Senor Redwood. Welcome to my hacienda, and pardon my seeming neglect in not sending the promised carriage for you."

"I'm glad to meet you again, Don Castilano," said Jack, springing off his horse. "Let me introduce you to Miss Winter, the daughter of the manager of La Rosas mine." The Spaniard bowed courteously. "Also to my friend, Robert Bassett, of San Francisco, California."

The Don expressed the pleasure he felt at making their acquaintance, speaking in very good English.

The Spaniard then invited them all to accept the hospitality of his home.

They were soon seated in the spacious patio, which was paved with well-scrubbed stones, laid in geometrical designs, and shaded by the usual pecan trees.

Fragrant roses bloomed on all sides, mingled with other gorgeous plants.

Jack subsequently learned that the house was older even than the monastery, and was the original residence of the Brotherhood of San Pedro in its infancy.

A substantial meal was ordered prepared by the Don, for he knew that his guests must be hungry after their long ride from Real del Monte, and until it was ready the party talked together in a lively style, that is Bob excepted, for his inability to converse in Spanish placed him at a disadvantage.

However, he and Don Castilano were able to get along fairly well together, while Jack and the two girls made up a group of their own.

Now that Mercedes saw that she stood in no fear of Clara as a rival for Jack's heart, she dropped the haughty, distant manner she had at first assumed toward Miss Winter, and treated her in a particularly friendly way.

She did not sit next to Jack, but on the other side of Clara, and even when she replied to the young American she did not at any time look at him.

Under these circumstances Jack was not sure how she had taken his declaration of love.

He was not sorry he made it, for at least it set his position right in the senorita's mind, and cleared up the misunderstanding she had at first labored under.

Finally the meal was announced and all went in to the dining-room.

Mercedes and her father had already dined, and so they merely sat down to keep their guests company.

"Don Castilano, why are the church and monastery closed to public inspection?" said Jack.

"There are reasons connected with the latter which I cannot explain, Senor Redwood. The church, however, is not absolutely interdicted to strangers. They can see the interior by applying at the priest's quarters on the ground floor of the monastery, when an assistant will show them through the edifice. It is very well worth seeing, being much superior to the usual country church."

"Miss Winter came on this trip especially to see the church and the monastery, of which she has heard a great deal to arouse her curiosity," said Jack.

"I regret that it will be impossible for her to enter the monastery. Strangers are not allowed within the postern gate. After all there is nothing that is so very interesting there. The rooms are mostly of cell-like appearance and proportions, for the Brotherhood led a very austere life. They have absolutely no furniture. The Brothers slept on beds of straw or dried brush, and knelt on the bare stones when they performed their private devotions. The ground floor, now occupied by the resident pastors, is the only part of the building that is worthy of inspection. Here the rooms are large, particularly the refectory, where the Brotherhood took their meals at long bare tables, seated on benches without backs. There are niches about this room that once were filled with solid silver images, it is said. They are empty now. Where the images went no one



knows. The monastery was never despoiled by vandals, so the inference is that they were hidden by the last of the Brotherhood, with all the valuable vessels and decorations connected with the church. The church, however, you can see. I will send a servant for the key, and will show it to you myself," said the Don.

Although Clara and the boys would liked to have gone through the monastery, their disappointment was rendered less keen when they heard that they were to view the church.

The Don said there were several rare paintings in it, which had been brought from Europe more than 100 years since, and that the carvings in the wooden altar were really excellent pieces of work.

The wooden panels, representing the "stations of the cross," had also been executed by some member or members of the Brotherhood.

Before the meal was over the Spaniard excused himself to send for the key of the church, and when the young people arose from the table he was ready to accompany them.

Mercedes went along, of course, but Jack could not get her wholly to himself, as she persisted in attaching herself to Clara, and so the boys walked on either side, with the Don by himself in advance.

The interior of the church surprised Clara and the boys.

It was quite spacious, considering the size of the congregation that attended the two morning masses on Sunday and holy days, or even at the evening vespers service, when all went in a body.

It had a framed roof covered with thatch, and this roof was supported by heavy columns, arched from one to the other, giving free ingress to the light and air from the garden on either side.

When Jack looked at these open walls, the base hardly more than two feet high all around, he thought it almost a superfluous precaution to lock the double front doors.

Anybody could enter the church at his ease by way of the gardens.

He afterward discovered that it was impossible to get into the gardens except through a small door at the back of the church owing to the thick and high wall of prickly cactus which surrounded them completely.

They were standing in the center of the stone floor, which had no pews to obstruct it—the worshippers kneeling on it all through mass, which was something of a penance, when you come to think of it—gazing at the picture of the "Immaculate Conception," above the altar, when Jack noticed that one of the floor blocks bore the words in Latin, "Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum" (And I expect the resurrection of the dead).

"Why is that there, and what does it mean?" he asked the Don.

Don Castilano translated the sentence and then explained that the slab covered the stone steps leading down into the vaults under the church where some 200 of the Brotherhood were buried, several of whom had been there nearly 150 years.

"There can't be much left of those chaps," said Jack: "I mean those who were interred so long ago."

"Nothing but dust," said the Don, solemnly.

"It is said that the Brotherhood hid a considerable treas-

ure in the vaults, including all the church vessels and ornaments and images that you mentioned at the house."

"You mustn't believe all you hear, Senor Redwood," said the Spaniard, with a slight frown. "It is true that the mysterious disappearance of the ornaments, vessels and images has given rise to the impression that they are hidden somewhere in the vaults, but they can hardly be called a treasure, though quite valuable. The authorities of the State once searched the vaults for the alleged treasure, but they found nothing, and went away convinced that there is nothing of value there."

"That slab is very heavy, I suppose?" said Jack. "All the slabs look pretty solid."

"No. None of the slabs are very thick. That one works on hinges, concealed underneath. It is easy to open, but is only touched once a year when a high mass is sung for the repose of the souls of the Brotherhood. The priest and his assistant then descend and sprinkle the exposed coffins with holy water."

The Don then showed them through the gardens, which were one mass of blooming plants, after which they left to return to the hacienda, passing close to the wall of the monastery so they could obtain as near a view as possible of the old edifice from the outside.

The postern gate happening to be open, they caught a view of the courtyard, which gave them an idea of the depth of the enclosure.

When they reached the hacienda, Jack said it was time for them to start on their return.

Mercedes said something in a low tone to her father and he nodded.

"Now that you are here, Senor Redwood, why not remain with us for a week or so?" said the Don. "One of my servants shall go with your friends and see that they reach home in safety. It will save you the trouble of riding over tomorrow or next day, for I was about to send for you."

Jack was perfectly willing to stay.

In fact he was eager to do so, for it meant many tete-a-tetes in prospect with Mercedes, but he was not sure that such an arrangement would meet with Miss Winter's approbation.

Clara, however, quickly put any doubts he had to rest by saying that she guessed Jack had better stay and get his visit over with, since he had talked so much about it that she felt sure he would have a very pleasant time.

And so it was decided that Jack should remain and one of the Don's servants take his place as Miss Winter's second escort.

"You will explain my absence to your father, Miss Clara," said Jack.

"Oh, yes; that will be all right," she answered. "I'm afraid, though, we are leaving you in a very dangerous situation," she added in a whisper.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Jack.

"The Senorita Mercedes is very beautiful. If you haven't already lost your heart to her I'm afraid you will while you are here exposed to her charms."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack, with a conscious blush.

Clara laughed and cast a sly glance at Bob.

"What are you blushing so for?" she said.

"Me! I'm not blushing," protested Jack.



"Then it must be the reflection of the sun through the window on your cheeks," she answered, mischievously. "We will look for you in a week. If you fail to return then I will know that your case is hopeless."

"You will have to take the next convoy out, Bob," said Jack. "Look out for it, and take no chances."

"Leave that to me," replied Bob.

Then the Don, Mercedes and Jack said goodby, and off they rode.

## CHAPTER XII.

### WHAT JACK OVERHEARD.

Don Castilano invited Jack to take a walk around his property, the cultivated fields of which extended up the mountain slope behind the hacienda.

The young American accepted the invitation though he would have much preferred the company of Mercedes.

She, however, had disappeared without a word to him, and in consequence he was a bit uneasy as to the real state of her feelings toward him.

Jack and the Don spent an hour rambling around the property.

On their return the boy caught sight of a man at the door of one of the outhouses.

He retired abruptly on seeing them, but from the brief look Jack caught of his face he could have sworn he was the emissary of the Crimson Mask who delivered the note to him at the head of the mule convoy on his first trip.

"Of course that couldn't be the same man, but the fellow is as like him as though he were his twin brother," thought Jack, as they walked on.

Jack met Mercedes at the evening meal.

She sat facing him, and was shy about looking his way when she knew he was looking at her.

She did not have much to say, and so the bulk of the conversation was carried on in Spanish between the Don and his young visitor.

Jack was afraid Mercedes would take another flight after supper, but she did not, and Don Castilano left them together in the patio.

"We always go to vespers, Sunday night, Senor Jack," Mercedes said. "Have you any objection going with us?"

"None whatever," replied Jack. "My mother was a Catholic, and I have often attended that Church, though I'm not a regular attendant at any."

From that point the conversation went on, Jack taking care to avoid saying anything sentimental.

He was satisfied to have the girl he loved by his side, where he could listen to the music of her voice in softly spoken Spanish, and look at her gloriously beautiful face from time to time.

She on her part seldom glanced at him, but once when his hand rested on her arm the thrill that swept through her warm Spanish blood sent waves of color to her cheeks, and she breathed quicker as her heart beat faster.

At length the church bell sounded and the Don reappeared.

He was pleased to learn that his guest was going to at-

tend the evening service, and he appeared to regard Jack with increased favor.

As they walked to the church Jack saw groups of the villagers wending their way in the same direction.

There were no absentees but the sick on Sabbath evening.

When they drew near the door they were saluted with great respect by the people who drew aside to let them pass.

The Don led the way up to their accustomed spot on one side near the altar, where the Don and Mercedes knelt and Jack, of course, followed their example.

The priest and altar boys had not yet appeared, and Jack glanced around on the kneeling congregation, and noted their costumes and general appearance.

Suddenly his eyes rested on the slab that bore the Latin inscription.

No one knelt there, and it stood out clear and distinct in an open space.

Jack's thoughts began to concern themselves with the gloomy vaults of the dead below.

And from the dead they easily reverted to the treasure that was supposed to be hidden somewhere there.

The church, the worshippers and even the priest and the three boys, one carrying the censer, from which issued at times thin wisps of white smoke, all vanished from his material vision, as his thoughts went groping around among the gloomy vaults, that his fancy painted, wondering if the treasure was really hidden in that sepulchre of the dead.

At length the short service was over, and everybody filed outside.

The Don, Mercedes and Jack were the last to leave.

Together they walked back to the hacienda.

The moon was just rising about the mountains as they reached it.

Jack and Mercedes paused outside to look at it, while the Spaniard went in.

There is a witchery in the moon, but more so in a semi-tropical country like Mexico than elsewhere, and it had its effect on the young people.

For some moments they stood in silence, then Jack said:

"Are you provoked with me, Mercedes?"

"Provoked!" she murmured.

"At my boldness in telling you that I loved you?"

She made no reply.

"I told you the truth. It is no crime to tell a girl you love her better than your life as I do you. I do not suppose you care for me other than a friend, but I had to tell you just the same, even at the risk of displeasing you. Now I am to stay here a week and we shall be much together. If my confession was distasteful to you I want you to know it now, and henceforth my lips will always be on their guard. I will mention love no more, we will part as the best of friends. But I shall carry your image always in my thoughts, and think of you as the one girl who might have made me happy."

He stopped and the soft night breeze wafted to the spot the tinkling of a guitar from some spot not far distant.

Then rose a clear tenor voice, and from the lips of the singer rippled a warm Spanish love song.

Jack and Mercedes listened with bated breath.



They stood as motionless as statues till the last note died out.

Then the young American drew a long breath.

"Mercedes," he said, "that is my finish. I can't stay here longer than to-night. I cannot enjoy your society and feel like a lost soul peering in at the gates of Paradise. I must go and see you no more."

"No, no; you must not. I cannot let you go. I love you—I love you!" cried Mercedes, throwing her arms around his neck, in her impulsive, Spanish way, and laying her lovely face close to his.

"You love me?" he cried, hardly believing the evidence of his ears.

"Yes, yes—with all my heart—with all my being. I'm yours, Jack, yours forever," she said, in a caressing tone.

An hour later when Jack retired to his room he stood and looked out of the window, which faced the village.

"I must find out who that singer was," he thought. "He did the business for me, and I shall never forget him as long as I live. And I will reward him for it if I can get the chance."

As he was about to turn away two shadowy figures came from around an angle of the building.

They seemed to glide forward rather than walk, and they stopped under the window.

"You heard what the captain said, Sanchez?" said the taller of the two. "The business is to be done to-night."

"Si, I heard him. Caramba! He is truly a dare-devil to venture into the vaults among the dead in search of that treasure."

"There is nothing he won't attempt. You ought to know that by this time."

"He is certainly what los Americanos call 'the limit.' If the treasure is there he will find it."

"If it is there? It is there. The paper the captain secured proves that, but the most important part of the directions were missing—torn off in some way."

"How unfortunate! In what part of the vaults is it supposed to be?"

"At the southwest end."

"The coffins of the Brotherhood are all at the other end, I believe, Pedro?"

"They are; stacked in tiers across the main vault—210 of them, the captain said."

"If we were caught in that vault there would be trouble for us. The priests and people would regard it as a sacrilege, and that's a serious thing, Pedro."

"We will not be caught. The captain will have all avenues of approach guarded against surprise. Besides, at three in the morning all are asleep. Do not fear, Sanchez, we shall not be molested."

"I am not sure that I like the enterprise."

"Ha! Tell that to the captain."

"El demonio! I see myself doing that. I know the Crimson Mask too well to take chances with him."

"Bueno!" laughed the other. "Then you will be on hand, for his orders include you and myself to attend him to the vaults."

"Caramba! You mean that?"

"I do, my friend Sanchez," grinned Pedro.

"By the saints this is not pleasant news," growled San-

chez. "I would rather face a regiment than the ghosts of the Brotherhood."

"Fool! What harm can a dead man do?"

"He can come back and make trouble. I will stand watch, but enter the vaults—por Dios! It is too much to ask of me."

"Talk that way to the captain, and he will make a ghost of you. Don't be a bobo (fool). The Brotherhood are too happy in the next world to bother about what is going on in their vaults. Consider, amigo, the Crimson Mask honors us when he asks us to accompany him. Our share of the treasure will be greater in consequence. Isn't that a pleasant reflection, Sanchez?"

"Very; but the treasure is not found yet, Pedro. It is not well to count one's chickens too soon. By the way, I see that boy—the young Americano who saved the Senorita Mercedes from the dama blanca, and who says he is not afraid of the captain—he is here at the hacienda to stay awhile."

"Yes; I saw him to-day. It is a mistake to have him around. He has sharp eyes, and there is no telling what he might see. If he learned this was the roost of the Crimson Mask—"

"Bah! Why should he learn anything when the whole village is ignorant of the fact?"

"That boy is smarter than the whole village put together. These Americanos are no fools—most of them. If I had my way that boy should make a short stay. In my opinion he is dangerous," said Pedro.

"See that you keep out of his way for he has seen you."

"The captain was a fool to send me to him with that note. It is all on account of the senorita. He will do anything for her."

"Except give up the business."

"When we secure the treasure that will end it. Most of the silver has already been turned into money. Only the last lot is still on hand. While the soldiers are again hunting for us in the Sierra Madre we will quietly disband, and enjoy life on the proceeds. I shall feel sorry when it is all over."

"Caramba! You have queer taste. I shall be glad."

"Well, let us go and have a drink or two to the success of to-night's work."

At that moment the moon, which had been hidden behind a cloud during the interview, came out and shone full on their faces.

Jack, who had been watching and listening, caught a good look at them.

Yes, the man Pedro was the chap who had carried to him the note from the Crimson Mask.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### IN THE VAULTS OF THE DEAD.

Jack watched the men depart with rather tumultuous feelings.

So this place was the secret rendezvous of the Crimson Mask.

And the Crimson Mask—the daring leader of the ban-



mits who killed Smith, and looted so many silver ore convoys—had he discovered his identity?

Was he—

Jack hesitated to breathe his suspicions even to himself, for they circled around the father of the girl he loved, and who had declared her love for him that night under the light of the glorious moon.

Who else could the Crimson Mask be if not the Don?

Then across his brain flashed all that had passed between him and the Don in the glen, and it certainly had a significant tinge.

More even than that he recalled the conduct of Mercedes.

Her sudden cry when he mentioned the name of the Crimson Mask, and the fact that he was responsible for the death of Smith.

Then he recalled the sudden change which had come over the Don when he learned that he (Jack) had saved his daughter's life; as well as the senorita's parting words—"You do not know what a load is off my mind. I no longer fear that you will encounter danger that you cannot protect yourself against."

Then on top of it all came the note from the bandit assuring him that his convoy would not be molested, and that at all times he would be accorded the right of way to Guaymas.

If it was a fact that Don Castilano was masquerading as the Crimson Mask bandit, was it not his clear duty to inform the authorities of the State through Mr. Winter?

And yet could he bring the father of Mercedes to justice?

And could he ultimately marry a girl whose parent was a convicted criminal?

These conflicting thoughts greatly distressed Jack.

He felt that he was on the horns of a serious dilemma.

Suddenly his thoughts reverted to the treasure in the vaults of the church, the existence of which seemed to be established by the conversation he had just overheard.

That drove everything else from his mind.

At three that morning the Crimson Mask and his men were going to make an effort to get hold of it.

Already by means of a paper they had located it in the southwest corner of the vaults.

Probably with that clue they would be able to find it.

He looked at his watch.

It was eleven o'clock.

Four hours intervened before the bandits would descend on the church.

Had he the nerve to make use of those four hours to his own possible advantage by making an attempt to find the treasure himself?

Yes, he thought he had.

Looking out of his window he failed to see a soul moving about anywhere.

There were a few lights in the houses of the villagers, but his route to the church would not take him near them.

But how was he to reach the sheltered gardens of the church?

Having come to a determination to put the adventure through, he proceeded to prepare for it.

He had to have a light to find his way around the vaults.

He would take the small lamp in his room.

Then he needed an implement to pry up one side of the slab in the church.

He found what he wanted in a thin piece of steel, a foot long, which some one had left on the window ledge.

He removed his shoes, and with the lamp in one hand, and the steel in his pocket, he made his way down stairs to the patio.

The moonlight illuminated it.

He knew the position of the different doors, and going to one of them, he found no difficulty in letting himself out.

Then he started for the church, keeping as much as possible in the shadows of the trees and hedges.

Proceeding to the rear where the postern gate was, he examined the cactus as he went.

In one spot near the ground he noticed an opening.

Examining it carefully he judged that he could crawl through.

Pushing the lamp ahead of him he essayed the task.

His calculations were correct, and he presently stood up inside the garden.

Now that he was on the point of invading the domains of the dead, Jack's heart beat a bit quicker, but he was not afraid.

Gliding across the garden he reached the arched openings to the church.

As he had no time to lose he stepped into the church and advanced toward the stone which bore the Latin inscription.

High up in front of the altar, and hanging by a long bronze chain from a beam of the roof, burned a dim red light—a floating wick in perhaps a half pint of oil.

This light was never supposed to go out, day or night, for it marked the presence of the Host in the altar tabernacle.

Kneeling beside the stone, which worked on concealed hinges, Jack inserted the steel bar and easily pried up the slab.

Grabbing it by the edge he lifted it on its hinges and exposed to his view the stone flight of steps.

A dry and musty odor reached his nose.

Jack now lighted the lamp and with his whole mind filled with thoughts of the treasure of San Pedro he descended into the vaults.

The man Pedro had said that the coffins of the Brotherhood were arranged in tiers at the eastern end of the vaults, while the treasure was somewhere in the southwest corner.

As soon as Jack reached the floor, curiosity induced him to go to the east to see the coffins, for he judged that it must be an odd sight to see so many arranged in such close order, after the fashion of a receiving tomb in a public cemetery.

A few steps brought him to the other line of old-fashioned wooden coffins.

They were arranged on lightly built shelves, with a passage intersecting each double row.

On the foot of each coffin was painted a number and the year of interment.

Jack had no time to waste in this quarter of the vaults.

He simply took a rapid and comprehensive survey of the coffins as a whole, and then hurried over to the southwest corner.



If he expected to find any marks that would furnish a clue to the treasure he was disappointed.

He spent an hour in a vain search.

"I'll have to give it up," he muttered, disappointedly. "If the treasure is hidden here the Brothers who placed it in concealment intended it should never be found until the building was utterly demolished, which will not be soon. I must get away before the Crimson Mask and his followers appear on the scene, for they probably would not treat me very gently if they caught me in the church."

His watch showed that it was half-past two, so he had little time to lose.

Retracing his steps to the stone stairs he blew out the lamp and ascended.

But an unpleasant surprise awaited him.

When Jack appeared up the steps of the vault he was seized by Pedro.

"Aha! We have caught you!" he cried exultantly. "Down with you among the bones of the padres!"

The man with the Crimson Mask looked on and chuckled.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### A BOY OF TRUE COURAGE.

Pedro forced Jack down the steps and followed himself with a strong grip on his arm.

Behind him came Sanchez with a lantern.

"So, Senor Americano, we find you in the vaults of this church, eh?" said Pedro. "What brings you into the abode of the dead at this hour of the morning?"

"You'll have to find out for I'll never tell you," replied the plucky boy.

"Caramba! I might expect such an answer from you. By the mass, you are a bold fellow, and I knew you were dangerous to our interests. Now that we have got hold of you I fancy we will clip your claws. If the captain would take my advice he'd nail you up in one of those old coffins. But he won't, because you saved the young senorita's life. That is lucky for you, senor. However, you'll have to stay here a few days until your presence ceases to be a menace. Here comes the captain now."

The man with the Crimson Mask approached and gazed at Jack in the circle of the lantern light.

Jack looked at him attentively.

He was the same height and build as the Don, and had the same polished manner.

He also wore the identical kind of a ring on one of his fingers that the boy had seen on the Don's hand.

"Well, young senor, what have you to say for yourself?" asked the Crimson Mask. "What brings you to the vaults of San Pedro when you ought to be asleep in your room at the hacienda?"

The tones were the Don's and Jack's last doubt vanished.

"I have nothing to say at all, Don Castilano. You see I recognize you," replied Jack, boldly.

The Crimson Mask chuckled while a grin appeared on the rascally-looking faces of Pedro and Sanchez.

"Perhaps I can guess the reason of your presence here. You have heard about the treasure of San Pedro—that it

is said to be hidden in these vaults—and you came to hunt for it on the quiet. Is it not so, senor?"

"Well, I'll admit that such is the fact," said Jack. "It's about time somebody found it."

"Upon my word you are a brave youth. Have you no fear of the dead?"

"None whatever."

"Caramba! You would make a fine bandit," said the Crimson Mask in a tone of admiration. "I would make you an offer only for the fact that the days of the band are numbered—not by the authorities, but by ourselves. The Crimson Mask band, the terror of the Sierra Madre, will presently cease to exist."

"I am glad to hear it," said Jack.

"Why, senor? You, at least, appear not to be afraid of us."

"For the sake of your daughter—the best and sweetest little girl on the face of the earth."

"Aha! Have you fallen a slave to her charms?"

"If I have I am not ashamed of it. Until to-night I regarded you as one of the nature's noblemen—a Spaniard of high birth and breeding, who would scorn to cast the faintest blemish on the proud Castilian name he bore. As such I believed you would look down on a union between your only child and an American boy had no money nor a distinguished family at his back. But now that I find you are the chief of a gang of ruffians—thieves—you have so greatly fallen in my estimation that I blush for you."

"Those are bold words to address to me, young senor," said the Crimson Mask, in a tone that trembled with suppressed anger.

"If they are they are true. You have committed a crime not only against yourself and the Mexican Government, but against your innocent daughter. How can you excuse yourself? How can you attend mass and vespers in the church above, and kneel, as I saw you kneel last night, before the altar of your religion, and still remain the man you are? Is there a spark of real Christianity in you?"

"Senor, you are the first person who ever dared talk this way to me and escape the consequences on the spot. If you hadn't saved the life of my daughter—well, no matter. You saved her and that fact protects you. But you are now too dangerous to my interests for me to permit you to leave these vaults until the safety of myself and my men are assured. We came here to secure the treasure of San Pedro and with it and our other spoils to leave the country forever. If we are successful we will have left the valley tomorrow night. One of my band I shall leave behind to supply you with food until it is safe to let you go."

"And you take Mercedes with you, and I never shall meet her again?" said Jack, his voice breaking for the first time.

There was a pause, during which he could see the eyes of the Crimson Mask scanning him through the slits of his disguise.

"You love her?" he said at length, in a changed voice.

"As I love my country for whom I would at any time lay down my life," replied Jack.

"And she—does she care for you?"

"She loves me with all her heart—with all her being."

"She has made that confession to you?"

"Yes—last night."



"And believing as you do that her father has dishonored his proud name and lineage by associating himself with a band of bandits, you would marry her?"

"I would. The world if it learned the truth might look with scorn upon her, but I would protect her against the world. I would draw around her form the stars and stripes of the greatest nation on the face of the globe and defy man or woman to speak ill of her."

"Senor Redwood, you are a young gentleman, and I feel proud to offer you my hand," said the Crimson Mask, extending his arm.

"Pardon me, Don Castilano, I must decline to take it. You may separate your daughter from me—that is your fatherly right; but I won't shake the hand of a bandit—a hand that perhaps caused the death of poor Smith."

"Caramba! This is too much. Pedro, Sanchez, bind him to yonder column. We have already lost too much time with him," cried the Crimson Mask.

Jack was speedily forced against the column in question, and bound with a rope that passed several times around his body, pinning his arms to his side.

There he was left and the three men strode to the southwest corner of the vaults to search for the treasure.

For more than an hour Jack watched the flickering light of the lantern as it passed from spot to spot, or rested for minutes in one place.

At the end of that time the Crimson Mask and his two companions returned to the place where the boy was.

"Adios, young senor," said the leader, with an ironical bow. "I fear your stay here will be longer than was intended for the treasure has eluded our first search. One of my men will supply you with food, and you will see us again tomorrow morning. Your captivity will continue till we find the treasure, for on that we depend. Mercedes will miss you, but that is unavoidable. I will assure her that you are perfectly safe, and that your absence is necessary to my safety and that of the band. She knows me and will not dare complain. Buenos noches."

Thus speaking, the Crimson Mask strode forward toward the stone steps, up which he vanished, leaving Jack alone in the darkness and the society of the dead.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE TREASURE OF SAN PEDRO.

We will not attempt to analyze Jack's thoughts as he stood bound and helpless in the vaults of the church of San Pedro.

At length utter weariness overcame him and he fell into a deep sleep, from which he was aroused some hours later by Pedro and Sanchez, who had brought a supply of food and wine to him.

His right arm was released and he was told to help himself.

He did not turn down the invitation for he was hungry.

When Jack finished his meal the men rebound his arm and went away, telling him they would return after dark with his dinner.

That meant he would have to pass a long and dreary day in the vaults without a soul to talk to.

If it was only that he had to look forward to the young American would not have cared; but judging from the

words of the Crimson Mask many days might pass before he was released from the vaults.

As time elapsed, at a rate he had no idea of, his thoughts were divided alternately between Mercedes and the treasure.

He thought most of the girl, for she was a definite object, while the treasure was rather problematical.

The slab was lifted and the two bandits reappeared with a basket full of food for the prisoner.

They were unaware that in spite of all their precautions they had been seen by no less a person than Mercedes.

The girl had been informed that Jack Redwood had been temporarily dealt with for the good of those concerned, and would not appear at the hacienda for several days at least.

There was a scene between her and her informant, from which she retired in tears.

She went to her room and stayed there the greater part of the day.

Suddenly a thought occurred to her, and then a look of determination came over her face.

She called her maid and had a talk with her.

The result of this was that just at dark a figure somewhat resembling the maid, but which was Mercedes herself, left the house and took its way to the church.

On the way she stopped at the monastery and secured the key of the postern gate which would admit her to the church gardens.

She entered the church and retired to a corner.

In a short time she saw Pedro and Sanchez come in with the basket of provisions, raise the slab communicating with the vaults and go down.

Hardly had they disappeared when she glided across to the opening and listened.

She heard voices below at a distance.

Though feeling the usual dread of most people to venture into the realm of the dead, love conquered fear and she descended.

With Pedro's lantern to guide her steps she went softly forward to a point where she could see Jack bound to the pillar.

There she remained while the boy ate his dinner, turning over in her mind the best plan to adopt to free him.

Sanchez had just replaced the plates in the basket and Pedro was reaching for the lantern when she made a sudden dash forward.

"Pedro, I order you to—"

That was as far as she got for her words were drowned by a yell of terror from Sanchez.

He dropped the basket and fled like a demented man.

Pedro, startled beyond measure, followed him in a hurry.

Both scurried up the steps, Pedro pausing only long enough to close the slab, thus shutting the senorita in with her lover.

"Oh, Jack, Jack—mi alma! (my soul)," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, and kissing him.

"Mercedes!" exclaimed the astonished boy. "You here!"

"Si, si. I am come to save you."

"My darling! How brave of you! Have you a knife to cut me free?"

"I have my dagger," drawing it from her bosom.

In a minute or so Jack was free.



"Now let us go," she said.

Jack picked up the lantern and led the way to the stairs, Mercedes clinging to his arm.

When they reached them the darkness above showed that the stone was in its place, and their retreat cut off.

"Ave Maria!" cried Mercedes. "We are shut in."

"Never mind, love. Your father will come for you as soon as those rascals report to him their scare, and he misses you."

"They report to him! They know better."

"Know better! Are they not his men?"

"His men! Never! He would scorn to—"

"What! Is not your father the Crimson Mask?"

"He the Crimson Mask! Oh, heavens! Why do you think that? No, no, he is not."

"No!" cried Jack, with a thrill of joy. "Then who is the Crimson Mask?"

"You swear never to reveal it?"

"I swear, by my love for you."

"It is my uncle. My father's twin brother—Luis Castilano."

"And I thought it was your father. Forgive me, love."

"You are forgiven."

Jack led her toward the southwest corner of the vaults.

"Your uncle is searching for the treasure of San Pedro which is somewhere here if his information is correct," said Jack, striking the blank wall with his hand.

There was a loud click and a section of the wall fell away in the shape of a secret door.

"Eureka!" cried the astonished boy, drawing the girl into the hidden chamber.

In their excitement they did not notice the door closing on its hinges.

The room was filled with shelves, and these were covered with silver images, church vessels, and ornaments; also a large dinner service of plate.

Around on the floor were stacked pile on pile of silver ingots, weighing probably ten pounds each, and all of one size.

There were hundreds of them, all of a brilliant white color.

As Jack gazed on the contents of the room there was no doubt in his mind that he had discovered the treasure of San Pedro.

We will not dwell on their surprise and pleasure.

For the moment their peculiar position was forgotten.

"Your uncle must not get hold of this. It is ours by right of discovery, Mercedes," said Jack. "Ours to begin life on and be happy."

At that moment she noticed that the door was shut and called his attention to the fact.

Things began to look dubious until Jack noticed a door in the corner.

This let them into a narrow tunnel through which Jack led the way.

After traversing a considerable distance they came to a blank wall which barred further progress.

But the lantern light revealed a brass knob, which Jack pushed and a small door opened through which they passed.

As it was closing of itself the boy shoved the piece of steel he had under it so that it stood a little ajar.

They now found themselves in the cellar of the monastery, with a flight of steps before them.

Ascending them they came into the kitchen, which was untenanted.

A door let them out in the courtyard.

They hurried to the postern gate, and Jack opened it without difficulty.

Fifteen minutes later they entered the hacienda where they found the Don in a stew over the unexplained absence of his daughter.

"I found him, father," said Mercedes, "and he knows our secret."

The Don appeared quite overcome.

"You will be silent for my little girl's sake, will you not?" he said.

"On my word of honor," replied Jack. "I make no condition to you, but your brother must leave the country, or the arm of the law will surely reach him."

"He intends to as soon—"

"As he finds the treasure. That he never will, for Mercedes and I have found it, and we shall take means to hold on to it."

Jack told the Don how they came upon it.

"The padres will not allow you to take it away," said the Don.

"On condition that they will I shall hand over to them everything but the ore ingots—thus they will recover all the church property through me and Mercedes, and I think we are entitled to our terms," said Jack.

Next morning Jack and Don Castilano visited the monastery and secured an interview with the padre.

Through the Don's influence an agreement was effected by which the silver ingots came into Jack's possession, and the rest of the treasure went to the church.

That afternoon Jack saw Luis Castilano for the first time without his mask.

He was the living image of the Don.

At that interview he agreed to leave Mexico at once and send his men adrift after a division of the spoils.

Reader, I am done, for all that remains to tell is that three months later Jack was married to Mercedes in the church of San Pedro, with Bob as best man, and Clara as bridesmaid, and with his marriage the young American retired from the employ of Pickering & Co. and settled down at the hacienda with his lovely wife to enjoy life on the proceeds of the Treasure of San Pedro.

Next week's issue will contain "FRANK FISK, THE BOY BROKER; OR, WORKING THE WALL STREET STOCK MARKET."

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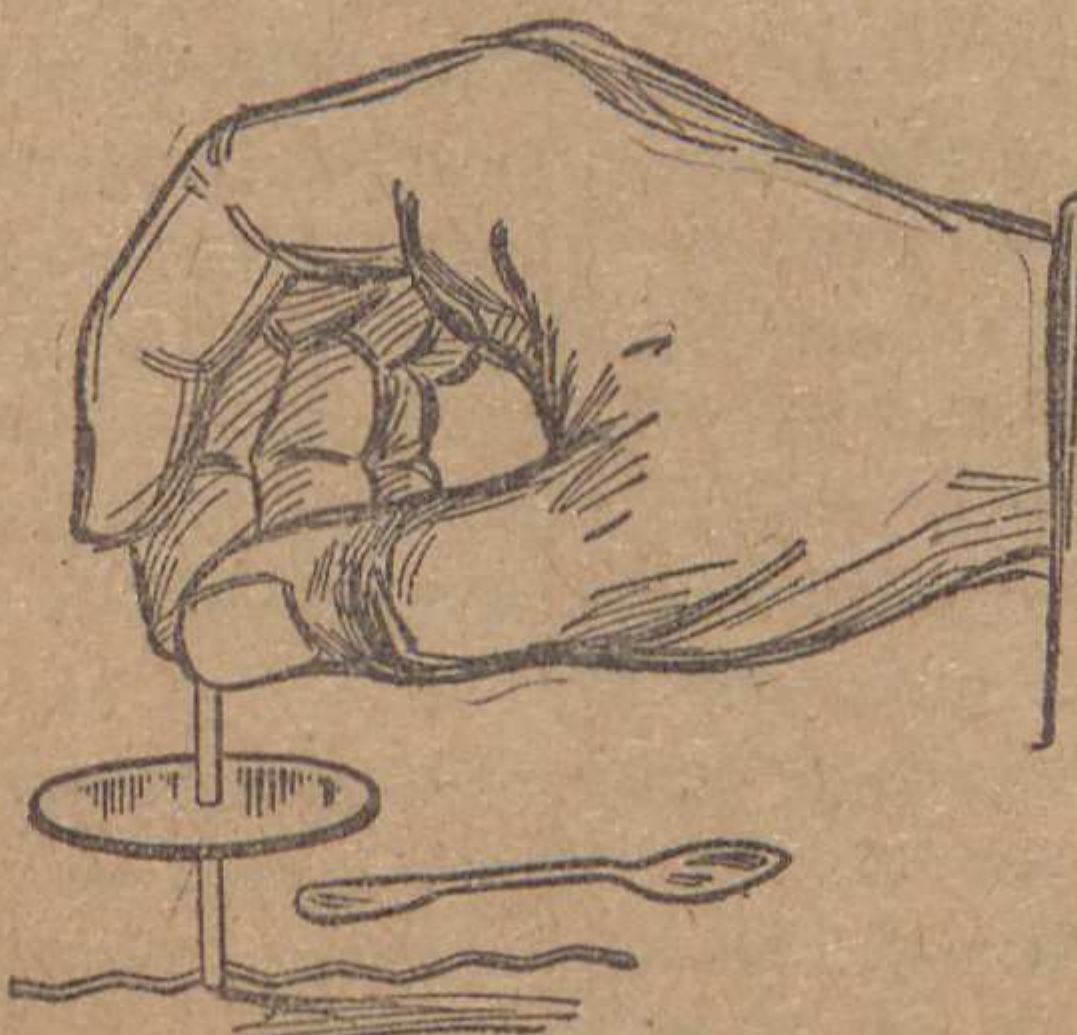
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## GOOD STORIES.

The Peak of Teneriffe projects a huge shadow stretching upward of fifty miles across the deep, and partly eclipsing the adjoining islands. Exaggerated shadows of immense size are commonly seen in many other places. On the Hartz mountains the so-called Spectre of the Brocken throws gigantic shadows of mountain climbers into the sky, repeating every movement made by them. The same occurs on the summit of Pambamarca, in Peru. On the tops of Alpine peaks and on the summit of Ben Lomond, in Scotland, mists in one case and rarefied air in the other explain these optical illusions. The same causes produce also colored shadows, varying at each hour of the day, and traceable to the dispersion of the solar rays.

Three beavers have come down Duncan Creek, a stream that penetrates the heart of the city and empties into the Chippewa River. The beavers landed on an island in mid-stream a few yards away from the Columbia street bridge. Hundreds of citizens went there to see them. It is supposed that the beavers are in quest of another site for a dam. The island where they landed would afford an excellent location for such a structure and in case they should build it there the water would back up and flood a big planing mill plant. The State game laws do not allow any one to interfere with the beavers and especially of their work in constructing dams. Hence citizens have appealed to Deputy Game Warden J. R. de Long to take up the matter of preventing dam building here with the State game warden at Madison.

It is an old and much disputed question by what means pigeons find their way home over distances sometimes of hundreds of miles. Some extraordinary suggestions have been offered to explain this strange faculty, such as that the birds are guided by magnetic currents, that they possess a special sense of direction enabling them to reverse a course once pursued, and that they have a particular arrangement of the internal organs of the ear which affords a means of guidance. The problem has been attacked again recently by P. Hachet-Souplet, director of the Institute of Animal Psychology in Paris, who concludes that the whole secret is contained in the ability of the pigeons to lay their course by recognized points in the landscape beneath them. He believes that the longest authenticated flights are explicable in this way.

One of the early morning sights in Boston is the small army of women farm laborers starting out for their day's work on the truck farms or gardens in the suburbs. They start early, they return late, but their season is short. The sight of women working in the fields has come to be so common in the garden farming districts as to attract no special attention. Almost all of these women are Italians, the very picture of health, short and sturdy, straight backed and straight limbed, and they can handle a hoe or even a fork or spade with as much dexterity and effectiveness as the average man. But when it comes to weeding these women seem to be in a class all by themselves. It is a picturesque sight to watch at a distance a group of these weeders at work. One thing the Italian won't do. She won't lay aside her bright colored finery. It seems as necessary to her happiness when she is on her knees weeding onions or breaking her back crushing potato bugs as it is when she is gossiping on her house stoop or celebrating a holiday.

## JOKES AND JESTS.

Uncle Joe—Well, Johnny, you are getting quite a big boy now. How old are you? Johnny—Six. Uncle Joe—And what are you going to be? Johnny—Seven.

Fair Devotee—I don't see any way to raise our church debt except to have a lottery. Minister (shocked)—That will never have my sanction, madam; never, unless you call it by some other name.

Captain—Did you throw out the anchor, as I told you? Sailor—Aye, aye, sor. Yis, sor. Captain—Well, that's funny; the boat's still moving. Sailor—Well, come to think of it, I don't think there was any rope on it.

"Minnie," said the young man, whose heart was thumping violently, "do you know that everybody—er—says—says—that we—we are engaged?" "I suppose, Harold," she answered, "everybody thinks that—that we ought to be by this time." After that it wasn't long until everybody knew it.

"Somehow," she breathed softly—and a childlike smile lighted her flowery face—"somehow, when a man tells me he loves me, I always believe him." "That, sweetheart," he answered, with inspiration, "is because you know instinctively that no man can help loving you." And thus he won her. It was jolly, of course, but so it goes.

Seth Woodbury was a tight-fisted, hard-hearted old farmer. His brother William dying, the neighbors said from lack of proper treatment. Seth hitched up and drove into town to have a notice about his death inserted in the weekly newspaper. "There ain't no charges, be there?" he asked anxiously. "Oh, yes, indeed," answered the editor, "our price is two dollars an inch." "Cracky!" muttered the old man, "an' Bill six-foot-two."

"I'm afraid," said the publisher, "your novel won't have much of a sale." "I can't see why it shouldn't," replied the author. "Well, if you insist on having the truth, it is too long drawn out. The interest isn't sustained and it is very poorly written." "But my wife is going to sue me for divorce in a week or two, and there's likely to be quite a scandal." "Wait! I'll have a contract ready for you to sign in just a minute."



## DONALD FENTON'S LEAP

By John Sherman

"Above all things, Donald, as long as you remain in Ferndale have nothing to do with any of the Dunstons. Do not recognize or speak to any of the hated tribe, at the risk or arousing my anger. That is all the order I give you; amuse yourself as you see fit, but go not near that detested family, or—"

The sentence remained unfinished, but the stern look upon his father's face warned Donald Fenton that it would be dangerous to disobey the injunction.

"Do you still cherish the same hard feelings you did previous to my departure for Europe?"

"Time can never efface the memory of a wrong as great as mine, and during the ten years you have been away from me I have never forgotten, never forgiven it, and I never shall. That's a beautiful beast of yours in the stable. I admire not only your good taste in selecting, but your good fortune in securing so beautiful an animal."

"Ah, Midnight well deserves your praise."

"Better give her a chance to show her fine qualities in a dash over the Ferndale hills. Don't take the north road."

"Why not?"

"Because I bid you. Zounds, must I be questioned at every turn? Away with you, I shall be busy till dinner."

The old man's manner most unmistakably intimating that the conference was at an end, Donald turned on his heel and left the library whistling a popular air, and thrashing his boot with his riding whip.

"So the old sore is not healed up, and the Fentons and the Dunstons, although living within a few miles of each other, must still treat each other as if they didn't exist. It's outrageous, and I dare swear my father has long ago forgotten how the miserable quarrel originated."

He was by this time on the lawn, and gazed about him listlessly, taking little note of the lovely surroundings. The house and grounds of Ferndale were situated on the summit of a rocky hill, sparsely wooded, from which the surrounding country for miles could be viewed. Below it lay a deep valley, through which ran a road leading to a village some five miles distant. At a point two miles in the other direction a branch road started.

This led to the Dunston estate, and was called the North Road. No one in the employ of old Richard Fenton was ever allowed to set foot upon it, and if any of the private roads belonging to Fenton were ever trespassed upon by any of the Dunstons, whether of the family or of the dependants thereof, the matter was not lightly passed over.

Innumerable law suits took place between the families, in which, first one and then the other came off victorious.

Nor was the law always resorted to. Many and fierce were the encounters between the "hands" of the respective families, who ably imitated the example set them by the "heads."

Donald Fenton was the only remaining child of his father, and ever since a boy of nine years he had been in Europe, studying and traveling and helping to spend his father's money.

On his return home, a year or so after his mother's death, he was both grieved and annoyed to learn that the old difficulty still existed, and he determined to put an end to it, come what might.

As he stood on the lawn gazing far away upon the blue

outlines of the distant hills, the dark green of the tops of the trees in the gully, and the few fleecy clouds glorified by the afternoon sun, the neigh of a horse sounded upon his ear and disturbed his reverie.

"Aha, my darling, I had forgotten you. Ho, Michael!" he called, to a man who was just passing a few rods off. Saddle Midnight for me in a jiffy! I'm off for a scamper along the hills."

And the man hastened away, and presently returned with one of the most beautiful black mares that ever was shod.

She gave a glad neigh as he approached and pawed the ground impatiently with her beautiful foot, and by other signs showed her eagerness to indulge in a lively canter, a long, swinging trot, or a furious gallop. Donald sprang upon her back lightly, thrust his feet into the stirrups, and away darted the enchanting animal, and in a few seconds both horse and man were lost to sight among the trees.

The young man had ridden for two or three miles without taking particular notice of the direction, so occupied was he with his thoughts and the pleasure caused by the exhilarating exercise, when suddenly as he was turning into a cross road, which seemed by its lovely surroundings to afford a fit place for meditation, a strange figure rushed out and attempted to seize Midnight by the bridle.

"Hold! Dare to go further at your peril!" shrieked the figure, which was that of an old man scantily clad in coarse, faded garments. "This is no place for the heir of Ferndale."

"Let go of my horse. Who are you?"

"The avenging angel of the house of Dunston! Yet would I spare you," added the singular being, whose mind appeared to Donald to be affected. "You are a comely youth, and a noble—" he continued, in a softer tone, as he stepped aside, "and maybe it is your mission to unite the families so long at war and end this terrible feud."

"End it I will, if it is in any man's power to do it," answered Donald.

"Go thy way then, but beware of enemies. Know you not that this is the north road?"

"I care not what road it is so long as it pleases me," giving his horse the rein. "On, my good Midnight."

"Stay a moment; there is danger ahead."

"I fear it not still; here is for your trouble," throwing him a silver dollar as he passed rapidly by.

It will be well to mention in passing that the old man had, when a youth of Donald's age, been struck on the head with a stone in an altercation between the tenants of the rival houses, and had been rendered partially insane. He had for years styled himself the "Avenging Angel," and many were the fights he led in person, displaying great valor, and though frequently defeated, he was constantly planning new methods of harassing Mr. Fenton and the men in his employ.

Donald kept on at a good pace, the road rising at every step, when suddenly from behind a clump of trees three mounted laborers dashed out and furiously attacked him.

The boy drew his riding whip, and slashed vigorously about him, hitting one across the face with the stinging lash, and reversing his weapon dealt one a stunning blow on the shoulder with the heavily-loaded stock, laming his arm, and bestowing on the third, who approached too near, a crack between the eyes that temporarily blinded him.

"You cowardly villains, you shall repent this. Are there any more of you? if so, come on!" shouted Donald, clapping spurs to his horse, and looking back at his foes.

He rode up the hill, and before long he could see the towers of a splendid mansion rising over the tops of the trees, and in a few moments dashed into a broad avenue lined with noble trees. On either side was a high wall of hewn stone broken



at intervals with buttresses, pillars rising above the main line, on top of which were vases of choice flowers.

As Donald approached, he saw three ladies evidently in great distress, wringing their hands and uttering agonizing shrieks.

"Oh, save her—save her!" the foremost one cried, as she saw him.

He looked, and there in the waters of a lake was a beautiful young girl struggling frantically to save herself and crying for help. A light straw hat trimmed with roses floated near her, and far out of reach was a tiny boat, floating bottom upward.

Giving but one glance at the beautiful, frightened face before him, hearing only her piteous cries and unheeding the ladies on the bank, Donald seated himself as firmly as a rock in his saddle, tightened his grip on the reins, and dashing spurs into Midnight's foam-flecked sides urged the noble steed forward, who, with a snort of intelligence, made a flying leap over the moat and wall and struck the water not far from the drowning girl.

It was but a moment's effort to seize the arm of the young lady as horse and rider went down, and when they arose again she was on the saddle with our hero, who guided Midnight to a spot where the bank was less precipitous, and in a short time all three were once more safe on land.

"How shall we ever thank you?" said the lady who had first attracted Donald's attention. "Blanche insisted on getting some lilies for us and the boat upset, and but for you she would have been drowned. Tell us at least the name of her preserver?"

"I am named Fenton!"

At these words Blanche fainted.

Donald quickly caught her in his arms, and the house now being in plain sight, strode rapidly up the path with his inanimate burden and reached the wide veranda just as a portly, white-haired old gentleman emerged from the house.

"I have heard of your noble conduct, young gentleman, from one who saw you make the leap and came at once to acquaint me with the facts. I can never repay you for this; but you must at least enter and change your saturated garments. Here, Lizzie, Martha, Abigail, somebody, attend to your mistress."

"I only desire," said Donald, as Blanche was carried into the house, "to wait until I hear that the young lady has recovered. My clothes will soon dry in the wind as I ride back."

"Then at least tell me your name, young gentleman, that I may know to whom I am indebted for this great benefaction?"

"My name is Donald Fenton!"

"The heir of Fendale?"

"The same, and you are—"

"Gabriel Dunston!" shrieked the old man, in a towering passion. "How dare you trespass upon my grounds?"

"I had rather my daughter had been drowned than that one of your race should have done her a favor. No—no, you did right. You shall be rewarded. How much will you take—a hundred dollars, two hundred?"

"My services are not for sale, Mr. Dunston. I am willing to give them, but no money can buy them."

"Hum, no insolence. You're as haughty as your old fool of a father."

Donald waited to hear no more, but raised his arm to beat his defamer to the earth with the insulting taunts still on his lips, when a charming young lady, dressed in a soft, fleecy white robe, with a blush rose at her throat, and her raven hair falling loose upon her snowy shoulders, rushed between him and Duncan, and held out her hands to stay the blow.

"Spare him, Donald Fenton, for my sake. You have saved

my life, and I thank you. My father knows not what he says. By and by he will repent his harshness."

"Never, girl, never. Out of my sight or I'll disown you forever. Dare to raise his hand against a Dunston. Oh, I shall go mad! Ah! what is this? I feel faint. I—ah!"

"Help—help! My father has had a stroke of apoplexy! Oh, why did this ever happen?" cried the grief-stricken girl, bending over the deathlike form of her father, loosening his cravat and fanning his forehead.

Several hired men approached, and Mr. Dunston was carried into the house, still insensible. Donald did not like to intrude his presence upon Blanche at such a moment, and in the confusion, he quietly slipped away and walked rapidly down the hill to find Midnight.

When he reached the spot where he had left her he found traces of a struggle, but could see nothing of the animal.

"Those hounds have driven her away, and I shall have to walk, I suppose; pleasant prospect, very. Well, I have certainly not gained much by disobeying my father's commands."

He walked on as rapidly as his wet garments would allow, and soon emerged from the north road into the main thoroughfare. He presented rather a sorry appearance, without a hat, his clothes dripping and his boots making puddles wherever he placed his feet. But the evening was coming on, and he must be at home before dinner so that his father should not hear of his escapade, or see the plight he was in.

About an hour afterwards he was entering the gate at Ferndale, and was congratulating himself upon getting in unobserved, when Michael saw him, and ran up to him with a glad cry.

"Oh, Master Don, you're a sight that's good for sore eyes. Sure we thought you were killed when the poor horse came running in an hour ago, all wet and the saddle girths broken and covered with blood, and she herself with a bad cut in her side, the poor darling. Sure your father took on mighty bad when he saw, it, and I fear it's killed him. He's very low, the doctor says."

Donald hastily donned a dry suit of clothes and went to his father's room. The door was guarded by an assistant of the doctor's.

"May I go in? I must see him and tell him I am safe."

"I am afraid not; however, I will ask Dr. Black."

The quick ears of the dying man caught the tones of his son's voice, and he raised himself up in bed and commanded them to let Donald enter.

"Don, my boy, thank heaven you are safe! You gave me a great fright. What happened?"

"I saved Dunston's daughter from drowning, sir, and his men drove my horse away and cut her, and old Dunston threatened to hang me. Oh, father, don't go yet."

"Don, my boy, you have done your duty. Tell Dunston I forgive him—good-by—heaven bless you!"

The grasp relaxed, the eyes closed, there was a brief struggle, and when Donald laid the beloved form back on the pillow life was extinct.

At about the same moment Gabriel Dunston succumbed to the dread disease which had threatened his life; and the harvest moon, as it rose in all its glory, and bathed those two mansions with its silvery light, saw the head of each household a lifeless corpse, and the heir and heiress bowed in unspeakable grief.

With the death of both of the heads of these families the feud ended. After a suitable time had elapsed, Donald called upon Blanche Dunston and renewed the acquaintance so strangely begun, finding her more charming than he had imagined, even in his brightest dreams.

A year after Donald and Blanche were married, and thus the two estates were joined into one.



**The Dissolving Penny.**—A genuine penny is held by the fingertips. You offer it to your friend, and when he attempts to take it, the penny suddenly vanishes without any trace and is immediately reproduced from some quite unexpected place.....Price, 12c.  
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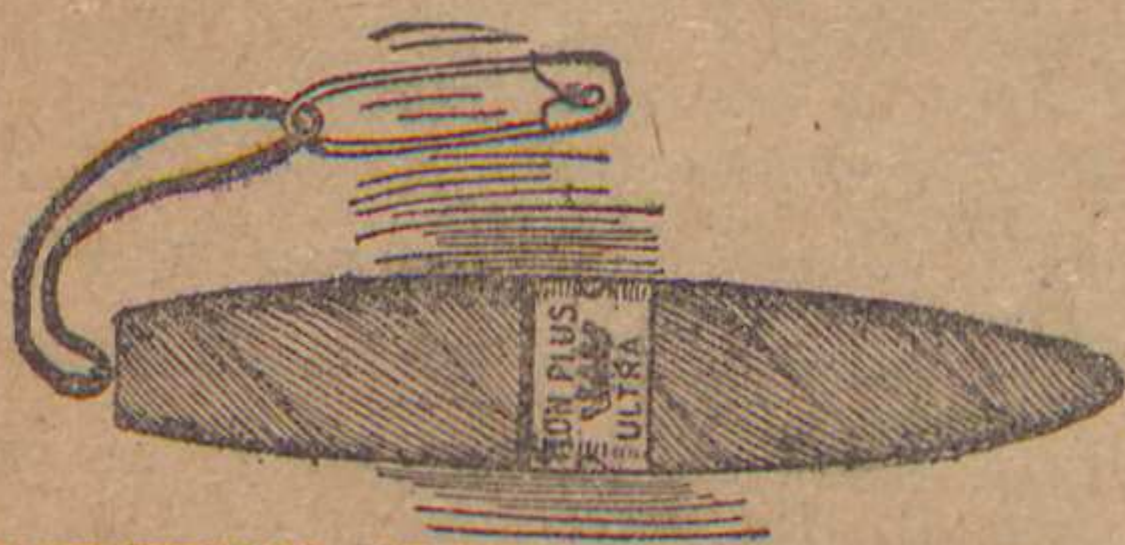
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The wonder of the age. The greatest small tool in the world. In this little instrument you have in combination seven useful tools embracing Key Ring, Pencil Sharpener, Nail Cutter and Cleaner, Watch Opener, Cigar Clipper, Letter Opener and Screw Driver. It is not a toy, but a useful article, made of cutlery steel, tempered and highly nicked. Therefore will carry an edge the same as any piece of cutlery. As a useful tool, nothing has ever been offered to the public to equal it.

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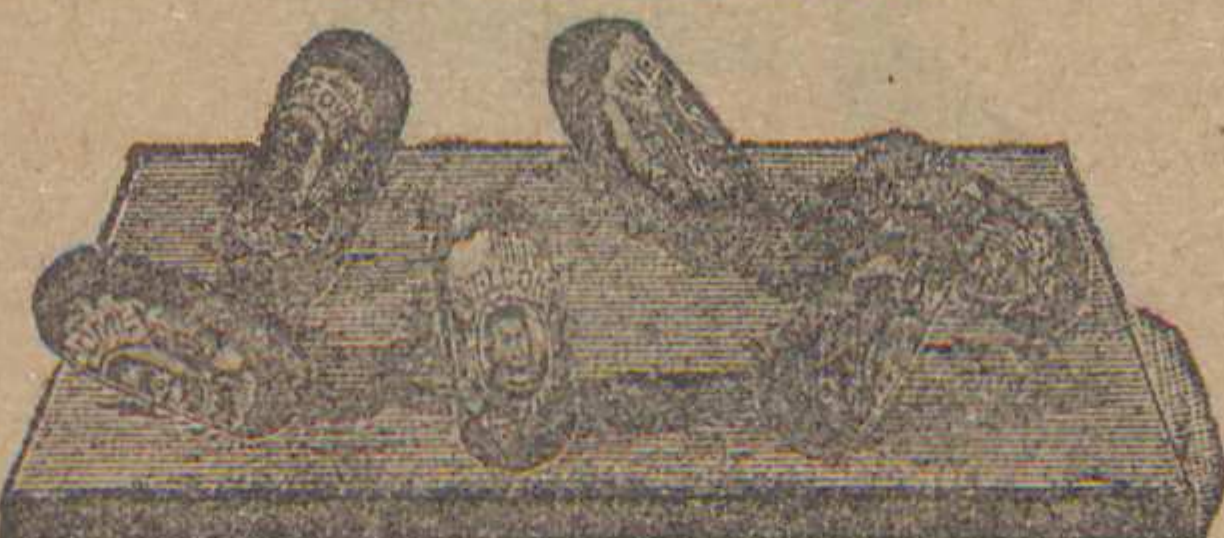
The sensation of the day. Pronounced by all, the most baffling and scientific novelty out. Thousands have worked at it for hours without mastering it, still it can be done in two seconds by giving the links the proper twist, but unless you know how, the harder you twist them the tighter they grow.  
Price, 6 cents; 3 for 15 cents; one dozen, 50 cents, by mail, postpaid.

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Price, per set, 10 cents; mailed postpaid.

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Price 10 cents by mail postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.



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The biggest sell of the season. A real cigar made of tobacco, but secreted in center of cigar about one-half inch from end is a fountain of sparklets. The moment the fire reaches this fountain hundreds of sparks of fire burst forth in every direction, to the astonishment of the smoker. The fire is stage fire, and will not burn the skin or clothing. After the fireworks the victim can continue smoking the cigar to the end.

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N. B.—Full printed instructions for performing the trick accompany each box, which also contains sufficient material for giving several exhibitions.

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The best practical joke of the season. This beautiful button-hole bouquet is made of artificial flowers and leaves which so closely resemble natural flowers that not one person in a thousand would detect the difference. After placing the bouquet in your button-hole you call the attention of a friend to its beauty and fragrance. He will very naturally step forward and smell of it, when, to his utter astonishment, a fine stream of water will be thrown into his face. Where the water comes from is a mystery, as you can have your hands at your side or behind you, and not touch the bouquet in any manner. You can give one dozen or more persons a shower bath without removing the bouquet from your button-hole, and after the water is exhausted it can be immediately refilled without removing it from your coat. Cologne can be used in place of water when desired. We have many funny things in our stock, but nothing that excels this.



Price, complete in a beautiful box, with full printed instructions, 25 cents, or three for 60 cents, by mail postpaid.

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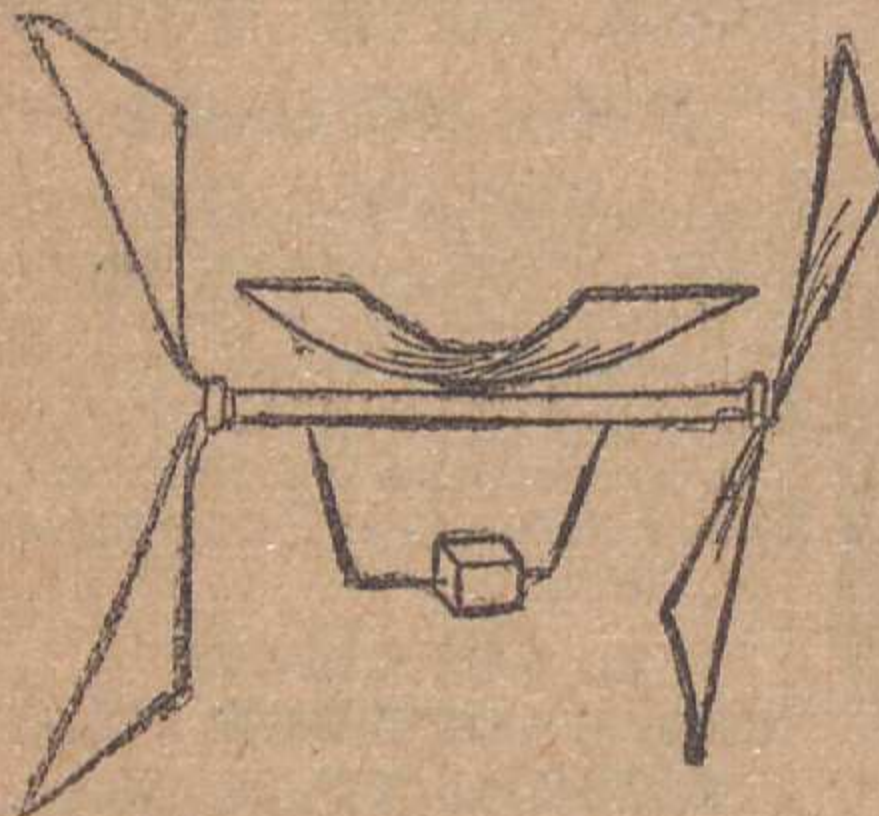


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Will fly on a horizontal line 150 feet! Can be flown in the house, and will not injure itself nor anything in the room. The most perfect little aeroplane made.

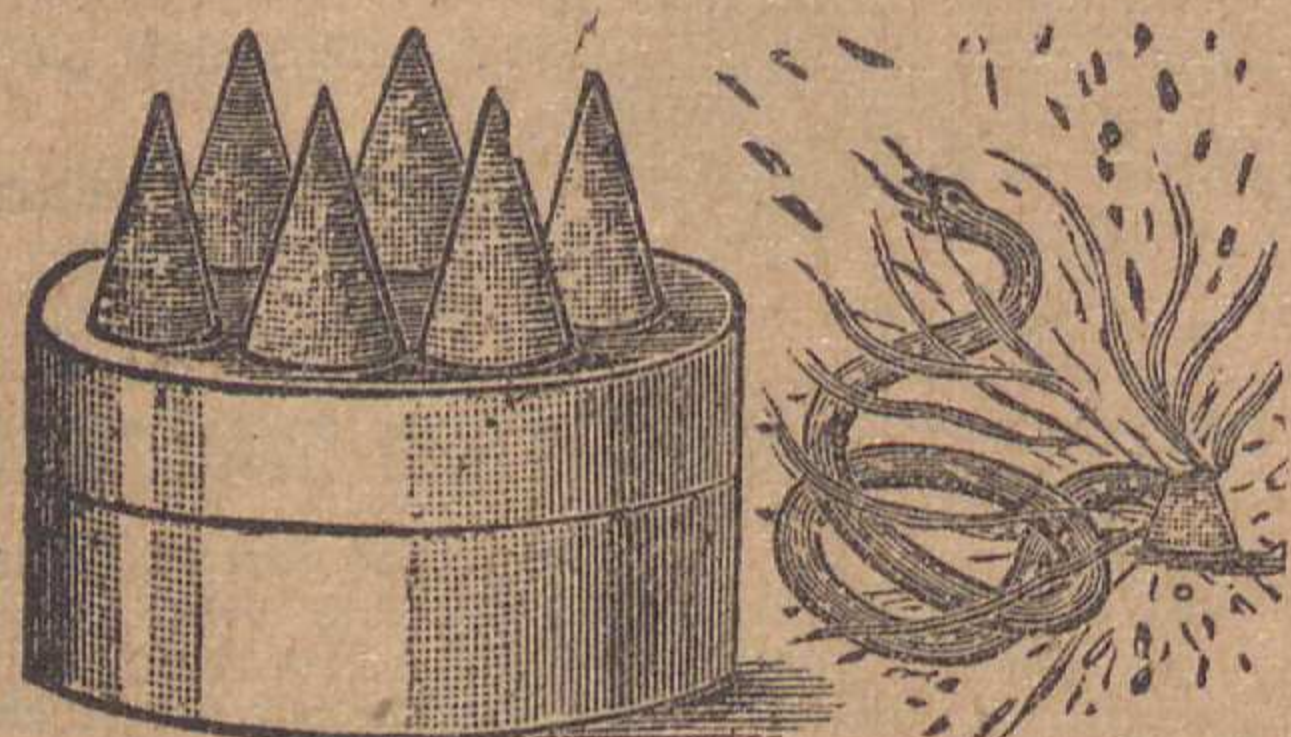
The motive power is furnished by twisted rubber bands contained within the tubular body of the machine. It is actuated by a propeller at each end revolving in opposite directions. Variation in height may be obtained by moving the planes and the balance weight. It can be made to fly either to the right or the left by moving the balance sideways before it is released for flight.

PRICE 35 Cents Each, Delivered.

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Something entirely new, consisting of six large cones, each one nearly one inch in height. Upon lighting one of these cones with a match, you see



something similar to a 4th of July exhibition of fireworks. Sparks fly in every direction, and as the cone burns down it throws out and is surrounded with what appears to be grass; at the same time a large snake uncoils himself from the burning cone, and lazily stretches out in the grass, which at last burns to ashes, but the snake remains as a curiosity unharmed. They are not at all dangerous, and can be set off in the parlor if placed on some metal surface that will not burn. An ordinary dust pan answers the purpose nicely.

Price of the six cones, packed in sawdust, in a strong wooden box, only 10 cents, 3 boxes for 25 cents 1 dozen boxes 75 cents, sent by mail post paid.

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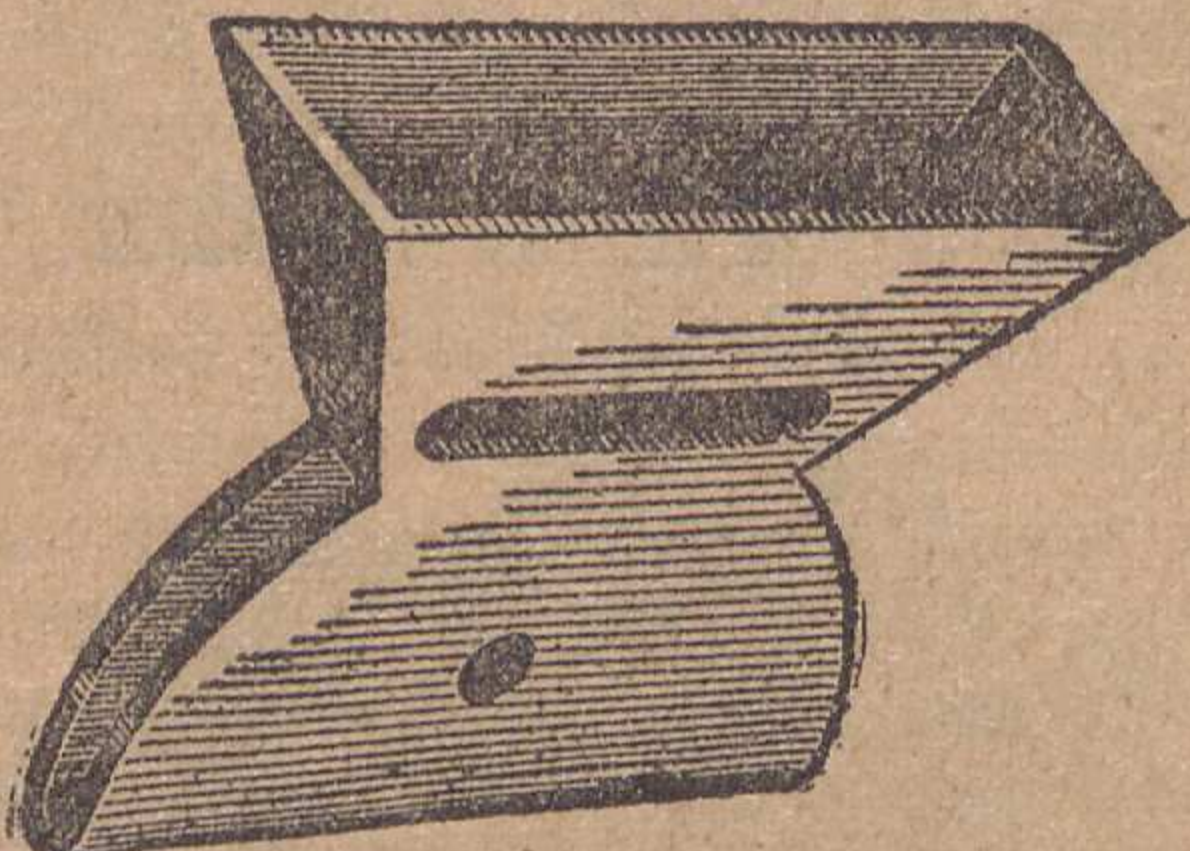
figure is mounted on a separate block, any boy can set up a regular parade or circus by printing the figures in different positions. With each set of figures we send a bottle of colored ink, an ink pad and full instructions. Children can stamp these pictures on their toys, picture books, writing paper and envelopes, and they are without doubt the most amusing and entertaining novelty gotten up in years. Price of the complete set of Rubber Stamps, with ink and ink pad, only 10 cents, 3 sets for 25 cents, one dozen 90 cents, by mail post-paid.

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## Good Luck Puzzle

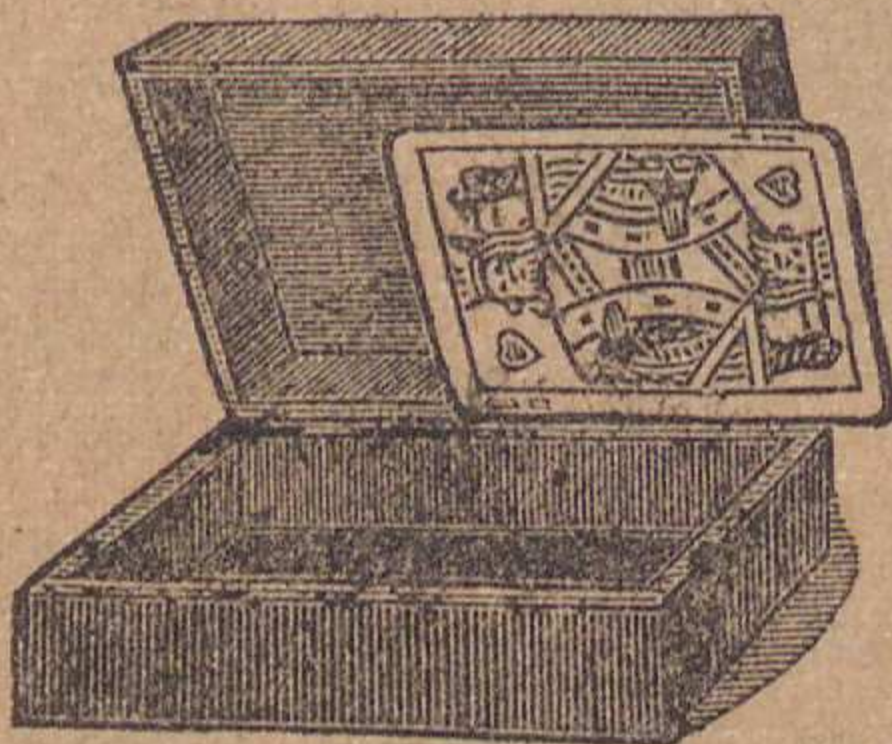
It consists of three horseshoes fastened together. Only a very clever person can take off the closed horseshoe from the two linked horseshoes. But it can be done in a moment when the secret is known.

Price by mail, 10 cents each

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One of the best and cheapest tricks for giving parlor or stage exhibitions. The trick is performed



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Full printed instructions by which anyone can perform the different tricks sent with each box.

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